

THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER 1, 1870.

BESSY RANE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XLII.

DISTURBING THE GRAVE.

BY twos and threes, by fours and fives, by tens and by dozens, the curious and excited groups were wending their way to Dallory churchyard. For a certain work was going on there, which had never been performed in it within the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

Richard North was lying at Dallory Hall, incapacitated. When Mr. Seeley—assisted by Dr. Rane, who came in—examined into his injuries at Mrs. Gass's, he pronounced them not to be grave. The bullet had struck a fleshy part of the arm, and passed off from it, leaving a wound. Care and rest only would be necessary to heal it; and the same might be said with regard to the blow on the temple. Perfect quiet was essential, perfect rest, to guard against any after-consequences. It was Mr. Seeley who continued to attend him by Richard's own wish: not Dr. Rane. The public thought the rejection of the latter ominously significant, in spite of Richard's recent exertions to do away with the impression of his guilt. Richard North knew how necessary it was, if only for his recommenced business, that he should not long be laid by, and he kept as quiet as Mr. Seeley could wish. No stranger was allowed to disturb him; none of the household presumed to carry him the smallest particle of news, public or domestic.

It was during this confinement of Richard's that Ellen Adair received her summons for departure. Her father had arrived in London, and wrote to Mrs. Cumberland—all unconscious of that lady's death—begging that she and Ellen would join him there. He apologized

to Mrs. Cumberland for not coming to Dallory, but said that family business required his presence in London. Mr. North at first proposed to take Ellen up himself: but he was really not fit; and it was decided that Parrit, Madam's maid, should attend her thither.

As Ellen was passing through the hall to enter the carriage that would take her to the station, she found herself touched by Madam, and drawn into the dining-room.

"You have not seemed very happy with us, Miss Adair. But I have tried to make you so."

"Yes, Madam, I am sure you have; and I thank you very much," returned Ellen gratefully—for Madam really did appear to have been most kind to her of late. "I trust papa will have an opportunity of thanking you and Mr. North personally."

Madam coughed. "If you think I deserve thanks, I wish you would do me a slight favour in return."

"If I can. Certainly."

"Some years ago when we were in India," proceeded Madam, "my late husband, Major Bohun, and your father were acquainted with each other. Some unpleasant circumstances took place between them: a quarrel, in fact. Major Bohun considered he was injured; Mr. Adair thought it was himself who was. It was altogether very painful, and I would not for the world have that old matter raked up again; it would cost me too much pain. Will you, then, guard from Mr. Adair's knowledge that I, Mrs. North, am she who was once Mrs. Bohun?"

"Yes, I will," said Ellen, in the hasty impulse of the moment, without pausing to consider whether circumstances would allow her to do so.

"You promise me this."

"Yes, certainly. I will never speak of it to him, Madam."

"Thank you, my dear." And Madam kissed her, and took her out arm in arm to the carriage.

Day by day Richard North never failed to question the surgeon in a whisper, whether there was anything arising fresh in regard to the accusation against Dr. Rane. The answer was invariably No. In point of fact, Mr. Seeley, not hearing more of it himself, supposed there was not: and at length, partly in good faith, partly to calm his patient, who was restless on the subject, he said it had dropped through.

Had it! During Richard's active opposition, Madam had found her hands somewhat crippled; for she scarcely deemed it might be altogether to her own interest at the Hall to set him at defiance: but the moment he was laid up, she was at work again more actively than ever. It was nothing but a Providence, Madam considered, that had put Richard out of the way for a time: and could Madam have released Poole from the consequences of his act, and sent him on his road rewarded, she had certainly done it. She gained her point. Poor Mrs. Rane was to be taken up from her grave.

Dale, who had it in hand, went about the proceedings as quietly and secretly as possible. He was sorry to have to do it, for he bore no ill-will to Richard North, but the contrary, and he knew how anxious he was that this should not be done; while at the same time the lawyer hated Madam. But, he had no choice: he had received his orders, as coroner, to call an inquest, and could not evade it. He issued his instructions in private, strictly charging the few, who must act, to keep silence abroad. And not a syllable transpired beforehand.

The work was commenced in the dark of the winter's morning. By ten o'clock, however, the men had been seen in the churchyard, and secrecy was no longer possible. Like wild-fire ran the news to all parts of Dallory—Mrs. Rane was being taken up. Never had there been excitement akin to this. People rushed about like maniacs. They made nothing of knocking at the doors of others who were strangers to them, and leaving the tidings: the street was in an uproar, the windows were alive with heads: had Dallory suddenly found itself invaded by a destroying army, the commotion could not have been greater.

Oh, then began the exodus to the churchyard. It was as though strings of pilgrims were flocking to a shrine. Mr. Dale had foreseen this probability, and was prepared. A body of police appeared in the churchyard, and the pilgrims found they could not approach the actual spot beyond the limits of a respectful distance. Naturally resenting this, they relieved their feelings by loud talking.

Jelly was there. Never nearer losing her reason than now. Between dismay at what she had set afloat, and horror at the crime about to be revealed, Jelly was not clear whether she stood on her head or her heels. When the news was carried to her of what was going on, Jelly nearly fainted. Now that it had come to the point, she felt that she would have given the world never to have meddled with it. It was not so much of the responsibility to herself that she thought, as of the dreadful aspect of the thing altogether. She went into a fit of trembling, and ran into her chamber to hide it: when somewhat recovered, she asked leave of Mrs. Beverage to be allowed to go out for a few hours. To have been compelled to remain in-doors would have driven her quite mad. The morning was getting late when Jelly arrived at the scene, and the first person she particularly noticed there was Mrs. Gass.

But Mrs. Gass had not come forth in idle curiosity as most others had done—and there were some superior people, in regard to station, amidst the mob. Mrs. Gass was inexpressibly shocked and dismayed that it should really have come to this. Oliver Rane was her late husband's nephew; she truly did not think he could have been guilty; and she had hastened to the spot to see whether any argument or persuasion might avail at this, the twelfth hour, to arrest proceedings and spare this disgrace to the North and Gass families.

But no. But no. Stepping over the barrier-line that the police had drawn, without the smallest regard to the remonstrance of a red-faced inspector, who was directing things, Mrs. Gass approached the small throng around the grave. She might have spared herself the pains. In answer to her urgent appeal she was told that nobody here had any power now; it was gone out of their hands. In getting back, crestfallen, Mrs. Gass encountered Jelly.

"Well," said she, regarding Jelly sternly, "be you satisfied with your work?"

Jelly never answered. In her shame, her regret, her humiliation at what she had done, she could almost have wished herself labouring at some expiating treadmill.

"Any way, girl, you might have had the decency to keep away," went on Mrs. Gass.

"I couldn't," said Jelly meekly. "I couldn't stop at home, and bear it."

"Then I'd have gone a mile or two the t'other way," retorted Mrs. Gass. "You've got a face of your own—to show it here. And a conscience too."

A frightful noise interrupted them: something between a shout and a yell. The heavy coffin was at length deposited on the ground with the tired pick-axes beside it, and the populace was expressing their mixed sentiments at the sight: some in a round of applause at this great advance in the show: others in a condemnatory groan of scorn meant for him who had caused it—Dr. Rane. Mrs. Gass, what with the yelling, and what with the coffin and pick-axes, and what with the crush, had never felt so cruelly humiliated in all her days; and she retired behind a remote tree to hide her face of pain.

"Where is he, the murderer? Why don't he come and look on at his poor victim? She'll soon be open to sight. The crowner ought to 'ancuff him and haul him here.—Rabbit them watchful perlice! They've got eyes behind 'em. They wants to be blowed up with a can o' powder. Look at old Jekyll there and his red face!—Ugh! the poisoner! What had poor Bessy North done to him, that he should put her in there! The lead's thick enough! it'll take time to open *that*. Bones! Blood! Fire!"

These sentences, amidst many others, penetrated to Mrs. Gass's ears. Just then Thomas Hepburn appeared in sight, his face very sad and pale.

"Hepburn," said Mrs. Gass, "I can't think they'll find anything wrong in there. My belief is she died natural. Unless there were better grounds to go upon than I know of, they ought not to have gone to this shameful length."

"Ma'am, I don't think it, either," assented the man. "I'm sure it has been more like a dream to me than anything else, since I heard it. Folks say it is Madam at the Hall that has forced it on."

Had Mrs. Gass been a man, she might have felt tempted to give Madam a very strong word. What right had she, in her ill-conditioned malice, to inflict this pain on others?

"Whatever may be the upshot of this, Thomas Hepburn, it will come home to her as sure as that we two be talking here. What are you going there for?" added Mrs. Gass, for he was preparing to make his way towards the open grave.

"I've had orders to be here, ma'am. Some of those law officials don't understand this sort of work as well as I do."

He crossed over, the police making way for him, Inspector Jekyll giving him a nod. Jelly was standing not far from Mrs. Gass, leaning her forehead against a tree, as she strained her eyes to look on. By the eagerness displayed by the crowd, and the difficulty there was in keeping them back, it might have been supposed they thought that they had only to get to see the face of the dead body, lying within, to have all suspicion of Dr. Rane turned into fact.

The work went on. Now during an interval of almost breathless silence; now amidst a half-suppressed roar. Suddenly, a frightful report was whispered from one to another; though who first spoke it, or whence it arose, none could discover—that their righteous curiosity was not to be gratified. That as soon as the shell should be disinterred from the leaden coffin, it was to be taken away unopened with what it contained.

Unopened! would they stand this? Were they Englishmen, and should a miserable jackanapes-at-law (meant for Dale) treat them in this way? Had not Bessy North grown amidst them, and would they not see justice done her? No, no; they had not come here to be cheated. They'd look on her if they died for it.

The leaden covering came off amidst a tumult, and the common deal shell alone remained now. So determined were the mob, so threatening grew their aspect and movements—and it was a pretty formidable mob now, as to numbers—that a timorous old magistrate, who was present, left the grave; and, putting up his hands for a hearing, assured them that the shell was to be opened, and should be opened, there on the ground.

It was at this juncture that another spectator came slowly up—although it might have been supposed that the whole of Dallory was already there. The mob, their excited faces turned to the old magistrate and to Thomas Hepburn, who was already at work, did not see his approach. Which was perhaps as well: for it was Dr. Rane.

Even from him had these proceedings been kept secret, perhaps especially from him; and it was only now, upon coming forth to visit a patient in Dallory, that he learnt what was taking place in the churchyard. He came to it at once: his countenance was stern, his face whiter than death.

Mrs. Gass saw him; Jelly saw him. Mrs. Gass silently moved to prevent his further approach, putting her portly black silk skirts in his way. Her intentions were good.

"Go back," she whispered. "Steal away before you are seen. Look at this unruly mob here. They might tear you to pieces, doctor, in the humour they are in."

"Let them—when I have stopped *that*," he recklessly answered, pointing to what Thomas Hepburn was doing.

"You are mad, doctor," cried Mrs. Gass in excitement. "Stop that! Why, look, sir, how impossible it would be, even with the best wish, to stop it now. A nail or two more knocked up, sir, and the lid's off."

It was as she said. Dr. Rane saw it. He took out his handkerchief, and passed it over his damp face.

"Richard North gave me his word that he would stop it if it came to such a pass as this," he murmured to himself more than to Mrs. Gass.

"Richard North knows no more o' this than it seems you knew of it," she said. "He is shut up in his room at the Hall, and hears nothing. Doctor, take advice and get away," she imploringly whispered. "There's time yet."

"No," he doggedly said. "As it has gone so far, I'll stand my ground now."

Mrs. Gass groaned. The sound was lost in a rush—a fight—a hoarse roar—policemen contending against King Mob, King Mob against policemen. It turned even Mrs. Gass pale. Dr. Rane voluntarily arrested his advancing steps. Jelly lifted her face and peered out from the distant tree.

The lid had been lifted, and the open shell stood exposed. It was more than the excited numbers could witness, and be still. Inspector Jekyll and his fellows kept them back from looking into it? Never. A short, sharp struggle, and the police and their staves were nowhere. With a triumphant whoop the crowd flew forward.

But a strange hush, seemingly of consternation, had fallen on those who stood at the grave; a hush fell on these interlopers as they reached it. The coffin was empty.

Of all unexpected stoppages to proceedings, official or otherwise, a more complete one than this had never fallen. The old magistrate, the coroner—who had just come striding over the ground, to see how things were going on—Thomas Hepburn, and others generally, stared at the empty coffin in profound perplexity.

And the draggle-tail mob, when it had taken its fill of staring also, elbowing each other in the process, and fighting ruefully for place and precedence, burst out into a roar. Not at all a complimentary one to Dr. Rane.

"He have sold her for dissection, he have! He never put her in at

all, he didn't! He had a sham funeral! 'Twarn't enough to poison of her, but he must sell her a'ter it!"

To accuse a man of these heinous offences behind his back and beyond his hearing, is one thing, but it is not felt to be quite so convenient to do it in his presence. The sight of Dr. Rane walking calmly (not to say impudently) across the churchyard into their very midst, struck a kind of timidity on the spirits of the roarers. Silence supervened. They even parted to let him pass, backing on each other's feet without mercy. Dr. Rane threw his glance on the empty coffin, and then on those who stood around it.

"Well," said he, "why don't you take me?"

And not a soul ventured to reply.

"I have murdered my wife, have I? If I *have*, why you know I deserve no quarter. Come, Mr. Coroner, why don't you issue your edict to arrest me? You have your officers handy."

The exceeding independence with which this was spoken, the impudent freedom of Dr. Rane's demeanour, the scornful mockery of his tone, could not be surpassed. He had the best of it now; might say what he pleased, and laugh derisively at them at will: and they knew it. Even Dale, the coroner, felt small—which is saying a good deal of a lawyer.

Turning round, the doctor walked slowly back again, his umbrella swinging, his head aloft in the air. Mrs. Gass met him midway.

"Tell me the truth for the love of goodness, doctor. I have never believed it of you. You did not help her to her death?"

"Help her to her death?" he retorted. "No: my wife was too dear to me for that. I'd have killed the whole world rather than her—if it must have come to killing at all."

"And I believe you, doctor," was the hearty response. "And I have told everybody, from the first, that the charge was wicked and preposterous."

"Thank you, Mrs. Gass."

He broke from her, from any further questions she might have put, and stalked away towards Dallory, coolly saying that he had a patient to see.

As to the crowd, they really did not know what to make of this: it was a shameful cheat. The small throng of officials, including the police, seemed to know as little. To be enabled to take Oliver Rane into custody for the poisoning of his wife, they must first find the wife, and ascertain whether she had been poisoned. Lawyer Dale had never met with so bewildering a check in the long course of his practice; the red-faced Inspector stroked his chin, and the old magistrate clearly had not got his proper mind back yet.

By the appearance of the shell, it appeared pretty evident that the dead body had never been in it at all. What had he done with it?—

where could he have hidden it? A thought crossed Mr. Jekyll, experienced in crime, that the doctor might have concealed it in his house—or buried it in his garden.

"How was it you did not feel the lightness of the shell when you put it into the lead, you and your men?" asked the inspector, turning sharply to Thomas Hepburn.

"We did not do it," was the undertaker's answer. "Dr. Rane undertook that himself, on account of the danger of infection. We went and soldered the lead down, but it was all ready for us."

A clearer suspicion of guilt, than this fact conveyed, could not well be found: as they all murmured one to another. The old magistrate rubbed up his hair, as if by that means he could rub up his intellect.

"I don't understand," he said, still bewildered. "Why should he have kept her out of the coffin? If he—if he did what was wrong, surely to bury her out of sight would be the safest place to hide away his crime. What do you think about it, Jekyll?"

"Well, your worship, I can only think that—that he might have feared some such proceeding as this, and so secured himself against it," was the Inspector's answer. "I don't know, of course: it is only an idea."

"But *where* is the body, Jekyll?" persisted the magistrate. "What could he have done with it?"

"It must be our business to find out, your worship."

"Did he cut her up?" demanded the mob. For which interruption they were chased backwards by the army of discomfited policemen.

"She may be about his premises still, your worship," said the Inspector, hazarding the opinion. "If so, I should say she is lying a few feet below the surface somewhere in the garden."

"Bless my heart, what a frightful thing!" cried his worship. "And about this? What is going to be done?"

He pointed to the coffins and the open grave. Yes: what was to be done? Lawyer Dale searched his legal memory and could not remember any similar precedent to guide him. A short counsel was held, the outsiders groaning and hissing an accompaniment to it.

"When her bones is found, poor lady, they'll want Chris'an bur'al: as good let the grave lie open," interposed one of the gravediggers respectfully—who no doubt wished to be spared the present labour of filling-in the earth. To which opinion the gentlemen, consulting there, condescended to listen.

And, finally, that course was decided upon: Thomas Hepburn being requested to have the coffins removed to his place, pending inquiry. And the gentlemen dispersed, and the mob after them.

A very dissatisfied mob, it was, shuffling and trampling out of the churchyard. They did not get much pleasure now, poor things, in their enforced idleness, their semi-starvation: and to be balked in this way

was about as mortifying a termination as the day could have had. There was only one worse to be imagined—and that was a possibility not glanced at : that it should have been discovered poor Mrs. Rane died naturally.

The last person left in the churchyard—except a man or two who stayed to guard the coffins, while means were being brought to take them away—was Jelly. To have watched Jelly's countenance when the empty shell stood revealed, would have been as good as looking at a picture. The mouth opened, the jaw dropped, the eyes were strained. It was worse than even Jelly had supposed, and Dr. Rane was a greater villain. Not content with taking his wife's life, he had also taken her body. Whether he had disposed of it in the manner affirmed by the mob, or in that suggested by the Inspector, or in any other way, the doctor must be one of the most hardened criminals breathing—his brazen demeanour just now in the graveyard would bear out *that*. And now the trouble was no nearer its clearance than before, and Jelly almost wished, as she had wished many a time lately, that she could die. Hiding herself from the spectators stood she, her brow pressed against the friendly tree's trunk, her heart faint within her. When the echoes of the trampling mob died away in the distance, Jelly lifted her head to depart also, drawing her black shawl around her with a shudder.

"*That's* why she can't rest, poor lady ; she's not laid in consecrated ground. At the worst, I never suspected this."

CHAPTER XLIII.

A NIGHT EXPEDITION.

SEVEN o'clock was striking out on a dark winter's night, as a hired carriage with a pair of post horses drew up near to the gates of Dallory Hall. Apparently the special hour had been agreed upon for a rendezvous, for before the clock had well told its numbers, a small group of people might have been seen approaching the carriage from different ways.

There issued out from the Hall gates, Mr. North, leaning on the right arm of his son Richard. Richard had quitted his chamber to join in this expedition. His left arm was in a sling, and he looked pale : but he was fast advancing towards recovery ; and Mr. Seeley, consulted confidentially, had given him leave to go. Mrs. Gass came up from the direction of Dallory ; and Dr. Rane came striding from the Ham. A red-faced portly gentleman in plain clothes, who was standing by the carriage, greeted them : without his official costume and in the dark night, few would have recognized him for Inspector Jekyll, who had been directing in the churchyard the day before. Mrs. Gass, Mr.

North, and Richard, got into the carriage. The inspector was about to ascend to the box, the postilion being on the horses, but Dr. Rane said he would prefer to sit outside himself. So Mr. Jekyll got inside, and the doctor got up; and the carriage drove away down Dallory Ham.

Peering out after it, in the dark night, behind the post of the gates, was Mrs. North. Someone by her side—it was only a servant-boy—ran off, at a signal from her, towards the stables with a message, as fast as his legs would carry him. There came back in answer Madam's carriage—which must have been waiting for the signal—with a pair of fresh fleet horses.

"Catch it up, and keep it in sight at a distance," were her orders to the coachman, as she stepped in. So the post-carriage was being tracked and followed: a fact none of its inmates had the slightest notion of.

In her habit of peeping and prying, of listening at this door, of putting her ear to that, of glancing surreptitiously into other people's letters, and of ferreting generally, Madam had become aware during the last twenty-four hours, that some unusual stir was shaking the equanimity of Mr. North and Richard; that some journey, to be taken in secret by Mr. North, and kept secret, was being determined on. Conscience—when it's not a good one—is apt to suggest all kinds of unpleasant things, and Madam's whispered to her that this hidden expedition had reference to herself; and—perhaps—to a gentleman who had recently arrived in England, William Adair.

The coachman had no difficulty in obeying orders. The post-carriage was not as light as Madam's. Keeping at a safe distance, he followed in its wake, unsuspected. First of all from the Ham down the back lane, and then through all kinds of unfrequented, cross-country by-ways. Altogether, as both drivers thought, fifteen or sixteen miles.

The post-carriage drew up at a solitary house on the outskirts of a small hamlet. Madam's carriage halted too, further off. Getting out of it, she told her coachman to wait; and she stole cautiously along under cover of the hedge, to watch proceedings. It was then about nine o'clock.

They were all going into the house: a little crowd of them, as it seemed to Madam; and the post-carriage went slowly away, perhaps to an inn. What had they gone to that house for? Was Mr. Adair in it? Madam was determined to see. She partly lost sight of prudence in her desperation, and was at the door just as it closed after them. Half a minute, and she knocked softly with her knuckles. It was opened by a young girl with a scarlet country face, and scarlet elbows.

"Law!" said she, "I thought they was all in. Do you belong to 'em?"

"Yes," said Mrs. North.

So she went in also, and crept up the dark staircase after them,

directed by the girl. "Fust door you comes to at the top." Madam's face was growing of a ghastly whiteness: she fully expected to see William Adair.

The voices would have guided her without anything else. Several were heard talking together inside the room: her husband's she distinguished plainly: and, she thought, Madam certainly thought, he was sobbing. Madam went into a heat at that. What revelation had Mr. Adair been already making? He had lost no time.

The door was not latched. Madam cautiously pushed it an inch or two open so as to enable her to see in. She looked very ugly just now, her lips drawn back from her teeth with emotion, something like a hyena's. Madam looked in: and saw, not Mr. Adair, but—Bessy Rane.

Bessy Rane. She was standing near the table, while Dr. Rane was talking. Standing quite still, with her placid face, her pretty curls falling, and a violet-coloured merino gown on, that Madam had seen her wear a dozen times. In short, it was just like Bessy Rane in life. On the table, by the side of the one candle, lay some white work, as if just put out of hand.

In all Madam's life she had perhaps never been so frightened as now—with present, sheer fright. The truth did not occur to her. She surely thought it was an apparition, as Jelly had before thought; or that—or that—Bessy had in some mysterious manner been conveyed hither from that empty grave. In these moments of confusion the mind is apt to run away with itself. Madam's was not strong enough to endure the shock, and be silent. With a piercing shriek, she turned to fly, and fell against a whitewashed chimney that the architect of the old-fashioned house had thought fit to carry upwards through the centre of it. The next moment she was in hysterics.

Bessy was the first to run to attend her. Bessy herself, you understand, not her ghost. In a corner of the capacious old room, built when ground was cheap, was Bessy's bed; and on this they laid Mrs. North. Madam was not long in recovering her equanimity: but she continued where she was, making believe she was exhausted, and put a corner of her shawl over her face. For once in her life the face had some shame in it.

Yes: Bessy was not dead. Humanly speaking, there had never at all been any more probability of Bessy's demise than there was of Madam's at this moment. Dr. Rane is giving the explanation, and the others are standing to listen, except Mr. North, who has sat down in an elbow chair of polished wood, while Richard leans the weight of his undamaged arm on its back. Mrs. Gass has pushed back her bonnet from her beaming face; the Inspector looks impassive as befits his calling, but on the whole pleased.

"I am not ashamed of what I have done," said Dr. Rane, standing

by Bessy's side ; "and I only regret it for the pain my wife's supposed death caused her best friends, Mr. North and Richard. I would have given much to tell the truth to Mr. North, but I knew it would not be safe to entrust it to him, and so I wished to let it wait until we should have left the country. For all that has occurred you must blame the tontine. That is, blame the Ticknells, who obstinately, wrongly, cruelly kept the money from us. There were reasons—my non-success in my profession for one—why I wished to quit Dallory, and start afresh in another place : I and my wife talked of it until it grew, with me, into a disease ; and I believe Bessy got to wish for it at last almost as I did."

"Yes I did, Oliver," she put in.

"Look at the circumstances," resumed Dr. Rane, in his sternest tones, and not at all as though he were on his defence. "There was the sum of money—two thousand pounds—belonging to me and my wife jointly, and they denied our touching it until one of us should be dead ! It was monstrously unjust. I think you must acknowledge that much, Mr. Inspector."

"Well—it did seem hard," acknowledged that functionary.

"I know I thought it so," said Mrs. Gass.

"It was worse than hard," spoke the doctor passionately. "I used to say to my wife that if I could take it out of the old trustees' hands by force, or stratagem, I should think it no shame. Idle talk, it was ; never meant to be anything else. But I'll get on. The fever broke out in Dallory, and Bessy was taken ill. She thought it was the fever, and so did I. I had fancied her a little afraid of it, and was in my heart secretly thankful to Mr. North for inviting her to the Hall. But for her putting off the going to it for a day—which she did herself through the absence of Molly Green—what happened later could never have taken place."

Dr. Rane paused, as if considering how he should go on with his story. After a moment he resumed it, looking straight at them, as he had been looking all along.

"I wish you to understand that every word I am telling you—and shall tell you—is the strict truth. The truth, upon my honour, and before Heaven. And yet, perhaps, even after this, you will scarcely give me credit when I say—that I did believe my wife's illness was the fever. All that first day (she had been taken ill during the night with sickness and shivering) I thought it was the fever. Seeley thought it. She was in a very high state of feverishness, and no doubt the fear of the fever for her served somewhat to bias our judgment. Bessy herself said it was the fever, and would not hear a word of hope to the contrary. But at night—the night of the first day, remember—she had nearly an hour of sickness ; and was so relieved by it, and grew so cool and collected, that I detected the nature of the case. It was nothing but a

bad bilious attack, accompanied by a very unusual degree of fever; but not *the* fever. 'You have cheated me, my darling,' I said in a jesting way as I kissed her, 'I shall not get the tontine.'—Here she stands by my side to confirm or refute it," broke off Dr. Rane, but indeed they could all see he was relating the simple truth. "'Can you not pretend that I am dead, Oliver?' she answered faintly, for she was still exceedingly ill; 'I'll go away, and you can say I died.' Now of course Bessy spoke this jestingly, as I had done: but nevertheless the words did lead to what afterwards took place. I proposed it—do not lay the blame on Bessy—that she really should go away, and I should give out that she was dead."

A slight groan from the region of the bed, smothered at once by a pretended snore. Dr. Rane continued.

"In prospective it seemed very easy of accomplishment—very. But had I foreseen all the disagreeable proceedings, the artifice, the trouble, that must inevitably attend such an attempted deceit, I should never have entered upon it. Had I properly reflected, I of course might have foreseen it: but I did not reflect. Like a great many schemes that we enter upon in life, the mind skips the working, and is content to skip it, and looks only to the end accomplished. Nearly all that night Bessy and I conversed together: chiefly planning how she should get away and where she should stay. By morning, what with the fatigue induced by this prolonged vigil, and the exhaustion left from her illness, she was thoroughly worn out. It had been agreed between us that she should simulate weariness and a desire to sleep, the better to evade a discovery of her, so far, restoration; but there was no need to simulate; she was both sleepy and exhausted."

"I never was so sleepy before in all my life," interrupted Bessy.

"The day went on," resumed Dr. Rane. "At ten o'clock, when Phillis left, I went up to my wife's room, and told her the time for acting had come. I crossed over to Seeley's with the news that my wife was gone: and I strove to show the grief I should have felt had it been true. Crossing back to my home again, I saw Frank Dallory, and told him. 'The play is inaugurated,' I said to Bessy when I went in—and then I betook myself to Mr. North; and then on to Hepburn's. Do you remember, sir, how I tried to soothe your grief?—speaking persistently of hope—though of course you could not see that any hope remained," asked Dr. Rane, turning to Mr. North. "I dared not speak more plainly, though I longed to do it."

"Ay, I do remember," answered Mr. North.

"The worst part of all the business was the next; the bringing in of the shell," continued the doctor. "Worse, because I had a horror of my wife seeing it. I contrived that she did not. Hepburn's men brought it up to the ante-room. Bessy was in bed still in the front room, and she heard them: I could not help that. When they left, I

put it down by the side of the wall with the trestles, threw some of my coats carelessly upon it, and so hid it. It was time then for Bessy to get up. While she was dressing, I went round to the stables, where the gig and horse I used are kept, to make sure that the ostler had gone to bed—for he had a habit sometimes of sitting up late. It was during this absence of mine that Bessy, dressed all but her gown, went to the landing to listen whether or not I had come in. The chamber door was open, so that the light shone on the landing; it happened to be at that moment that Jelly was at the opposite window, and she—later—took it to be Mrs. Rane's ghost that she saw."

The sight of Mrs. Gass's amused face was something good. She nodded in triumph.

"I thought it might be beer," said she. "I told Jelly what an uncommon idiot she was. Ghost, indeed!"

"Bessy made herself ready, took some refreshment, and I brought the gig to the back door in the garden, and drove my wife away. The only place open at that time of night—or rather morning—would be some insignificant open railway station. We fixed on Hewley. I drove her there; and left her sitting under cover in solitary state—for I had to get back with the horse and gig before people were astir. As soon as the morning was pretty well on, so as not to be remarked by strangers, Bessy walked to Churchend, about five miles' distance, and took a lodging in this house—this same room; where she has been ever since—and it is a vast deal longer time than we calculated on. Poison my wife!" added Dr. Rane, with some emotion, as he drew her to him involuntarily, with a gesture of genuine love. "She is rather too precious to me for that. *You* know; don't you, my darling."

The happy tears stood in her eyes as she met his. He stooped and kissed her, very fondly.

"If my wife were taken from me, the Ticknells might keep the ton-tine money, and welcome; I should not care for it without Bessy. It was chiefly for her sake that my great desire to possess it arose," he added, emphatically. "I could not bear that she should be reduced to so poor a home after Dallory Hall. Bessy constantly said that she did not mind it, but *I* did: minded it for her."

"Couldn't you have managed all this without the funeral?" asked Richard North, speaking for the first time.

"*How* could I?" returned Dr. Rane. "There were no means of avoiding it. When my wife was given out as dead, she had to be buried, or Mr. Inspector Jekyll, there, might have been coming in to ask the reason why. Had I properly thought of all that must be done, I should, as I say, never have attempted it. It was hateful to me; and I declare that I don't know how I could, or did, carry it through. Once or twice I thought I must stick fast, and confess, to my shame, that Bessy was alive—but I felt that might be worse, of the two, than

going on with it to the end. I hope the Ticknells will suffer for what they have cost me."

"Jelly says she saw the ghost twice," observed Mrs. Gass, her eyes twinkling still.

"Ah! that was Bessy's fault," said Dr. Rane, shaking his head at his wife, in mock reproof, as we do at a beloved child when it is naughty. "She was so imprudent as to come home for a few hours—walking across country by easy stages and getting in after nightfall. It was about her clothes. I have been over here twice at night—or three times, is it not, Bessy?—and brought her things each time; but I brought the most valuable of them. Bessy said she must have the others; and at last, as I tell you, she came herself, to look after them. I think the clothes were only an excuse—eh, Bessy?"

"Partly," acknowledged Bessy. "For, oh! I longed for a sight of home. Just one more sight as a farewell. I had quitted it in so bewildered a hurry. It again led to Jelly's seeing me. I was at my large chest-of-drawers, papa," she continued, as if speaking for Mr. North alone. "Oliver had gone round to get the gig to bring me back; I thought I heard him come in again, and went to the landing to listen. It was not he, but Jelly: and we met face to face. I assure you she frightened *me*—for consequences—quite as much as I did her."

"And, Bessy, my dear, what have the people here thought about it all the time?" inquired Mr. North. "Do they know who you are?"

"Why of course not, papa. They think I am a lady in poor health, staying here for the sake of country air—and I did feel and look very ill when I came. It is an old widow lady who has the house, and the girl you saw is her servant. They are not curious. They know us only as Mr. and Mrs. Oliver, and think we live at Bletchley. I want to know who it was that pushed matters to extremity in regard to these proceedings against my husband," added Mrs. Rane, after a pause. "It was not you, papa: and Richard was doing his best to hush it all up. Richard had known the truth since an interview he held with Oliver. Who was it, papa?"

Madam tumbled off the bed, moaning a little, as if she were very weak. Bessy had not the slightest idea that Madam had been the culprit.

"Who was it, Mr. Jekyll?" continued Bessy.

The Inspector looked up to the ceiling and down to the floor; and then thought the candle wanted snuffing. Which it certainly did. Madam said in a shrieking voice, as he was putting down the snuffers, that she should depart. If the others chose to stay and countenance all this unparalleled iniquity, *she* could not.

She stood, upright as ever, tossing back her head, all her native impudence returning to her. They let her go.

"When you found things were going to be pushed against you, sir,

why did you not declare the truth?" asked the Inspector of Dr. Rane.

"I knew that the moment I declared the truth, all hope of the tontine money would be at an end; that I should have done what I had done for nothing," answered Dr. Rane. "Richard North undertook to give me notice in time if things should be pushed to an extremity; but he got disabled, you know, and could not. Until they were in the act of disturbing the grave, I had no warning of it."

A pause of silence followed the answer. Dr. Rane resumed.

"Ill-luck seems to have attended it from the first. Perhaps nothing better was to be expected. Jelly's having seen my wife was a great misfortune. We are going now to America. I have not the money to join Dr. Jones as partner, but I daresay he'll be glad of me as an assistant."

"Look here," interposed Mrs. Gass. "I don't say that what you've done is anything but a very wrong thing, doctor; but it might have been worse: and, compared to what a lot o' fools were saying, it seems but a trifle. I was once about to make you an offer of some money. Finding you couldn't get the tontine paid to you and your wife; which, as I have told you, I thought was a shame, all circumstances considered; I resolved to advance it to you myself. Mrs. Rane's death stopped me; leastways, her reported death. You won't get it now, doctor, for certain, from the Ticknells—for I suppose they'll have to be told the truth: and so you shall have it from me. Two thousand pounds is ready for you, at your command."

A red spot of emotion flushed Dr. Rane's pale face. He gazed at Mrs. Gass eagerly, as if asking whether it could be true.

"It's all right, doctor. You are my late husband's nephew, you know, and all the money was his. You'll find yourself and your wife substantially remembered in my will; and as two thousand pounds of it may do you good now, it shall be advanced to you."

Bessy stole round to Mrs. Gass, and burst into tears on her bosom. Happy, grateful tears. The doctor, the scarlet flush deepening on his face, took Mrs. Gass's hand, and clasped it.

"And I wish to my very heart I had made no delay in the offer at first," cried Mrs. Gass. "It'll always be a warning to me not to put off till to-morrow what should be done to-day."

"I shall have to make things right with the authorities; and I suppose Hepburn may keep the coffins for his pains," quaintly remarked Mr. Inspector Jekyll.

But the carriage took back one less than it had brought. For Dr. Rane did not return again to Dallory.

PART THE THIRD.

CHAPTER XLIV.

ARTHUR BOHUN'S SHAME.

A WELL-SPREAD dessert-table of glass and china and plate, glittering under the rays of the handsome chandelier in the dining-room of Sir Nash Bohun's town house. Sir Nash and his nephew Arthur are seated at it, one guest between them. It is General Strachan; an old officer, Scotch by birth, who has just come home after passing the best part of his life in India.

The winter was departing. Arthur Bohun looked better, Sir Nash pretty well. In a month or two both intended to depart for the German springs, that were to renovate Sir Nash's life.

General Strachan had been very intimate with Sir Nash Bohun in early life, before he went out at all to India. After he went out he had been equally intimate with Major Bohun; but he was only Captain Strachan then.

"And so you think Arthur like his father," observed Sir Nash, as he passed the claret.

"The very image of him," replied the general. "I'm sure I should have known him for Tom Bohun's son had I met him accidentally in the street. Adair saw the likeness, too."

"What Adair's that?" carelessly asked Sir Nash.

"William Adair. You saw me with him at the club door this morning. We were going at the moment when you came up."

Perhaps Sir Nash was a little struck with the name. He called to mind a good-looking, slender, gentlemanly man, who had been arm-in-arm with the general at the time mentioned.

"But what Adair is it, Strachan?"

"What Adair? Why, the one who was in India when—when poor Tom died. He was Tom's greatest friend. Perhaps you have never heard of him?"

"Yes I have, to my sorrow," said Sir Nash. "It was he who caused poor Tom's death."

General Strachan apparently did not understand. "*Who* caused poor Tom's death?"

"Adair."

"Why bless me, where could you have picked up that?" cried the general in surprise. "If Adair could have saved Tom's life at any sacrifice to himself he'd have done it. They were close, firm friends to the last."

Sir Nash seemed to be listening as though he heard not. "Of course we did not get at the particulars of my brother's death, over here, as

we should have got at them had we been on the spot," he remarked. "We were glad, rather, to hush it up for the sake of Arthur. Poor Tom got into some trouble, some disgrace, and Adair led him into it. That's what we have always heard."

"Then you heard wrong, Bohun," said the general, somewhat bluntly. "Tom got into debt, and I don't know what all, but it was not Adair that led him into it. Who could have told you it was?"

"Mrs. Bohun, Tom's widow."

"Oh, she," returned the general, in an accent of contempt that spoke volumes. "Why she—but never mind now," he broke off, suddenly glancing at Arthur as he remembered that she was his mother. "Let bygones be bygones, Bohun," he added, sipping his claret; "no good to recal them. Only don't continue to believe aught against William Adair. He is one of the best men living, and always has been."

Arthur Bohun, who had sat still as a stone, leaned his pale face a little towards the general, and spoke.

"Did not this Mr. Adair, after my father's death, get into disgrace, and—and undergo its punishment?"

"Never. Adair got into no disgrace."

"Has he been a convict?" continued Arthur in a low, clear tone.

"A WHAT?" cried the general, putting down his glass and staring at Arthur in amazement. "My good young fellow, you cannot know of whom you are speaking. William Adair has been a respected man all his life: he is just as honourable as your father was—and the world knew pretty well what poor Tom's fastidious notions on the point of honour were. Adair is a gentleman amidst gentlemen; I can't say better of him than that though I talked for an hour. He is come into all the family honours and fortune: which he never expected to do. A good old Scotch family it is, too; better than mine. There, we'll drop the subject now: no good to reap up things that are past and done with."

Sir Nash asked no more: neither did Arthur. Some instinct lay within both of them that, for their own sakes, it might be better not.

But when the general left—which he did very soon, having an evening engagement—Arthur went out with him. Arthur Bohun knew, as well as though he had been told, that his wicked mother—he could but think of her so in that moment—had dealt treacherously with him; to answer some end of her own, she had calumniated Mr. Adair. Cost him what pain and shame it might, he would clear it up now.

"Will you give me the particulars—that which you would not give my uncle?" began Arthur in agitation, the moment they were out of the house, as he placed his hand on the general's arm. "No matter what they are, I must know them."

"I'd give them to your uncle, and welcome," said the plain old soldier. "It was to you I would not give them."

"But I must learn them."

"Not from me."

"If you will not tell them, I shall apply to William Adair."

"William Adair can give them you if he pleases. I shall not. Take advice, my dear young friend, and don't inquire."

"I will tell you what I suspect—that if any one had a hand in driving my father to—to do what he did do, it was his wife; my mother. You may tell me now."

"No. Because she is your mother."

"But I have the most urgent reason for wishing to know the particulars."

"Well, Arthur Bohun, I'd rather not tell you, and that's the truth. If poor Tom could hear me in his grave, I don't think he'd like it, you see. No, I can't. Ask Adair, first of all, whether he'd advise it, or not."

"Where is he staying?"

"Grosvenor Place. He and his daughter are in a furnished house there. She is very delicate."

"And—you say—I beg your pardon, General," added Arthur in agitation, detaining him as he was going away—"you say that he is an untainted gentleman."

"Who? Adair? As untainted as you or I, my young friend. Good night."

In his mind's miserable tumult, any delay seemed dreadful, and Arthur Bohun turned at once to the house in Grosvenor Place. He asked if he could see Mr. Adair.

The servant hesitated. "There is no Mr. Adair here, sir," he said.

Arthur looked up at the number. "Are you sure?" he asked of the man. "I was informed by General Strachan that Mr. Adair had taken this house, and was living here."

"The General must have said Sir William, sir. Sir William Adair lives here."

"Oh—Sir William," spoke Arthur, "I—I was not aware Mr. Adair had been knighted."

"Knighted, sir! My master has not been knighted, sir," cried the man, as if he were indignant at the charge. "Sir William has succeeded to the baronetcy through the death of his uncle, Sir Archibald."

What with one thing and another, Arthur's head seemed to be in a whirl. Sir Archibald Adair had been well known to him by reputation: a proud old Scotch baronet, of a proud old lineage. And so this was Ellen's family! And he had been deeming her not fit to mate with him, a Bohun!

"Can I see Sir William? Is he at home?"

"He is at home, sir. I think you can see him."

In the dining-room of the house sat Sir William Adair when Arthur

was shown in—his after-dinner coffee on a stand by his side, a newspaper in his hand. He was a slight man of rather more than middle height, with an attractive countenance. The features were good, their expression was noble and pleasing. It was impossible to associate such a face and bearing with anything like dishonour.

"I believe my name is not altogether strange to you, sir," said Arthur as the servant closed the door. "I hope you will pardon my intrusion—and especially that it should be at this late hour."

Sir William had risen to receive him. He could but mark the agitation with which the words were spoken. A moment's vacillation, and then he took Arthur's hand and clasped it within his own.

"If I wished to be cold to you I could not," he said warmly. "For, to me, you seem to be your father come to life again. He and I were friends."

"And did you wish to be cold to me?" asked Arthur.

"I have felt cold to you this many a year. Worse than that."

"But why, Sir William?"

"Ah—why. I cannot tell you. For one thing, I have pictured you as resembling another, more than him."

"You mean my mother."

Sir William looked at Captain Bohun before he replied. "Yes, I do. Will you take a seat: and some coffee?"

Arthur sat down, but it may be questioned whether he as much as heard that coffee was mentioned. Sir William rang the bell and ordered a cup of it brought in. Arthur leaned forward to speak; his blue eyes solemnly earnest, his hand a little outstretched. Sir William almost started.

"How strangely like him you are!" he exclaimed. "The look, the gesture, the voice, all are your father's over again. I could fancy that you were Thomas Bohun—as I *last* saw him in life."

"You knew him well,—and my mother? You knew all about them?"

"Quite well. I knew you too when you were a little child."

"Tell me one thing then," said Arthur, his emotion increasing. "Was she my mother?"

The question surprised Sir William Adair. "She was certainly your mother, and your father's wife. Why do you ask it?"

"Because—she has so acted—that I—that I—have many a time wished she was not. I have almost hoped it. I wish I could hope it now."

"Ah," said Sir William. It was all he said.

"Did you care much for my father, Sir William?"

"More than I ever cared for any other man. I have never cared for one since as I cared for him. We were young fellows then, he and I; not much older than you are now; but ours was a true friendship."

"Then I conjure you, by that friendship, to disclose to me the whole

history of the past : the circumstances attending my father's shocking death, and its cause. Speak of things as though my mother were no blood relative of mine. I wish to heaven she never had been ! ”

“ I think you must know somewhat of the circumstances,” spoke Sir William. “ Else why should you say this ? ”

“ It is because I know part that I must know the whole. My mother has—has—*lied* to me,” he concluded, bringing out the word with a painful effort. “ She has fostered a false story upon me, and—I cannot rest.”

“ Arthur Bohun, although you conjure me by your late father, and for his sake I would do a great deal, I fear that I ought not to do this.”

“ General Strachan bade me come to you. I begged of him to tell me, but he said no. Does he know all ? ” broke off Arthur.

“ Every tittle. I think he and I and your mother are nearly the only three left who do know it. There were but some half-dozen of us altogether.”

“ And do you not think that I, Major Bohun's only son, should at least be made acquainted with as much as others know ? Tell it me, Sir William : for my lost father's sake.”

“ The only difficulty is—that you must hear ill of your mother.”

“ I cannot hear worse of her than I know,” impetuously returned Arthur. “ Perhaps it was not as bad as I am imagining that it may have been.”

But Sir William held back. The coffee came in and Arthur drank it at a gulp, scalding hot, and sent the cup away again. He seemed on the brink of a fever in his impatience. And, whether it was that, or to clear the memory of Major Bohun, or that he deemed it a righteous thing to satisfy Major Bohun's son, or that he yielded to over-persuasion, Sir William Adair spoke.

They sat nearly together, the small coffee table between them. Whether the room was light or whether the room was dark, neither remembered. It was a miserable tale they were absorbed in ; one that need not be very much elaborated here.

William Adair, when a young man, quarrelled with his family, or they with him, and an utter estrangement took place. His father and mother were dead, but his uncle, Sir Archibald, and other relatives, were left. He, the young man, went to the Madras Presidency, appointed to some post there in the civil service. His family made a boast of discarding him ; he, in return, was so bitterly incensed and resentful against them, that had it been well practicable, he would have abandoned the very name—Adair. Never a word did he breathe to any one of who or what his family was ; his Scotch accent betrayed his country, but people knew no more. That he was a gentleman, and in a gentleman's position, was apparent, and that was all-sufficient.

A strong friendship ensued between him and Major Bohun.

During one hot season it happened that they both went up in search of health to the Blue Mountains, as Indians call the beautiful region of the Neilgherry Hills. Mrs. Bohun accompanied her husband; Mr. Adair was not married. There they made the acquaintance of the Reverend George Cumberland, who was stationed at Ootacamund with his wife. Ootacamund was at that time filled, and a great deal of gaiety (a great deal considering what the place was) was going on; Mrs. Bohun was noted for it. There was some gambling nightly: and no votary joined in it more persistently than she. Major Bohun removed with her to a little place at a short distance, and a few others went also; the chaplain, George Cumberland, was one.

There came a frightful day for Major Bohun. Certain claims suddenly swooped down upon him; debts; promissory notes, bearing his signature in conjunction with William Adair's. Neither understood what it could mean, for they had given nothing of the kind. A momentary thought arose to Major Bohun—that his wife was implicated; but only so far as that she might have joined in this high play; nothing worse. He had become aware that she had a passion for gambling, and the discovery had frightened him: in fact it was to wean her from undesirable associates and pursuits that he had come away on this holiday; the ostensible plea, health, was not the true one. But this was not known even to his best friend, William Adair. "Let me investigate this, let me deal with it," said the major to Mr. Adair. But Mr. Adair, not choosing to let a man forge his name with impunity—and he had no suspicion it was a woman—did not heed the injunction, but addressed himself to the investigation. And a nice nest of iniquity he found. He traced the affair home to one Rabbetson—but that was in all probability an assumed name—a man bad in every way; who was no better than a blackleg; who had wormed himself into society to prey upon it, and upon men and women's failings. This man Mr. Adair confronted with Major Bohun; and then—and then—the fellow, brought to bay, braved it out by disclosing who his helpmate was—Mrs. Bohun.

It was even so. Mr. Adair sat aghast at the revelation. Had he suspected this, he would have kept it to himself. How far she had connected herself with this man, it was best not to inquire; and they never did inquire; and never knew. One thing was certain—the man could afford to take a high ground. He went out from the interview bidding them do their worst—which with him would not be much, he affirmed; for it was not he who had issued the false bills, but the major's wife. And they saw he spoke the truth.

Arthur Bohun listened to this now, sitting still as a statue.

"I never saw any man so overcome as Bohun," continued Sir William Adair. "He took it to heart; to heart. 'And she is the mother of my child!' he said to me; and then he gave way, and held my hands in his, and sobbed upon my shoulder. 'We will hush it up; we

will take up the bills and the other obligations,' I said to him : though in truth I did not see how I should do my part in it, for I was a poor man : he was poor also ; his expenses and his wife kept him so. 'It cannot be hushed up, Adair,' he answered ; 'it has gone too far.' Those were the last words he ever said to me ; it was the last time I saw him alive."

"Go on," said Arthur, without lifting his head.

"Mrs. Bohun came into the room, and I quitted it. I saw by her face that she knew what had happened ; it was full of evil as she turned it on me. Rabbetson had met her when he was going out, and whispered some words in her ear. What passed between her and Major Bohun I never knew. Before I had been five minutes in my rooms she stood before me ; she had followed me down. Of all the vituperation that a woman's tongue can utter, hers lavished about the worst on me : it was I who had brought on the crisis, she said ; it was I who had taken Rabbetson to her husband. I quietly told her that when I took Rabbetson to Major Bohun, I had not the remotest idea that she was mixed up with the affair in any way ; and that if I had known it, known what Rabbetson could say, I never should have taken him, but have striven to deal with it myself, and keep it dark for my friend Bohun's sake. She would hear nothing ; she was like a mad woman ; she cursed me ; she swore that not a word of it was true ; that Rabbetson did not say it, could not have said it, but that I and Major Bohun had concocted the tale between us. In short, I think she was, for the time being, mad."

"Stay a moment, Sir William," interrupted Arthur. "Who was she ? I have never known. I don't think my father's family ever did know."

"Neither did I ever know—to a certainty. A cousin, or sister, or some relative of hers, had married a doctor in practice at Madras, and she was out there on a visit to them. Captain Bohun—as he was then—caught by her face and figure, both fine in those days, fell in love with her and married her. He found afterwards that her father kept an hotel somewhere in England."

So ! This was the high-born lady who had set up for being above all Dallery. But for the utmost self-control Arthur Bohun would have groaned outright.

"Go on, please," was all he said. "Get it finished."

"There is not much more," returned Sir William. "I went looking about for Bohun everywhere that afternoon ; and could not find him. Just before sun-down he was found—found as—as I daresay you have heard. The spot was retired and shady, and his pistol lay beside him. He had not suffered : death must have been instantaneous."

"The report here was that he died of sunstroke," said Arthur, breaking a long pause.

"No doubt. Mrs. Bohun caused it to be so reported. The real

facts transpired but to few : Cumberland, Captain Strachan, myself, and two or three others."

"Did Mrs. Cumberland know of them?" suddenly asked Arthur, a thought striking him.

"I daresay not. I don't suppose her husband would disclose to her the shameful tale. She was not on the spot at the time; had gone to nurse some friend who was sick. I respected both the Cumberlands highly. We made a kind of compact among ourselves, we men, not to speak of this story ever, unless it should be to defend Bohun, or for some other good purpose. We wished to give Mrs. Bohun a chance to redeem her acts and doings, in her own land, for which she at once sailed. Arthur, if I have had to say this to *you*, it is to vindicate your dead father. I believe that your mother has dreaded me ever since."

Dreaded him! Ay! and foully aspersed him in her insane dread. Arthur thought of the wicked invention she had raised, and passed his hands upon his face as if he could shut out the remembrance.

"What became of Rabbetson?" he asked, in a low tone.

"He disappeared. I think, else, I should surely have shot him in his turn, or kicked him to death. I saw him afterwards in Australia dying in the most abject misery."

"And the claims?—the bills?"

"I took them upon myself; and contrived to pay—with time."

"You left India for Australia?" continued Arthur, after a pause.

"My health failed, and I petitioned our government to remove me to a different climate. They complied, and sent me to Australia. I stayed there, trying to accumulate a competency that should enable me to live at home with Ellen as befitted my family: little supposing that I was destined to become its head. My two cousins, Sir Archibald's sons, have died one after the other."

Arthur Bohun had heard all he wished, perhaps all there was to tell. If—if he could make his peace with Ellen, the old relations between them might yet be renewed. But while his heart bounded with the hope, the red shame crimsoned his brow as he thought of the past. Glancing at the time-piece on the mantel-shelf, he saw it was only half-past nine; not too late.

"May I see your daughter, sir?" he asked in a low tone. "We used to be good friends."

"So I suppose," replied Sir William. "You made love to her, Mr. Arthur Bohun. You would have married her, I believe, but that I stopped it."

"You—stopped it!" exclaimed Arthur, quite at sea; for he had not known of the letter received by Ellen.

"I wrote to Ellen telling her I must forbid her to marry you. I feared at the time of writing that the interdict might not arrive in time. But it seems it did."

"Yes," abstractedly returned Arthur, letting pass what he did not understand.

"You see, I had been thinking of you always as belonging to her—your mother—more than to him. That mistake is over. I shall value you now as *his* son; more I daresay than I shall ever value any other young man in this world."

Arthur's breath came fast and thick. "Then—you—you will give her to me, sir!"

Sir William shook his head in sadness. Arthur misunderstood the meaning.

"The probability is, sir, that I shall be Sir Arthur Bohun; that I shall succeed my uncle in the baronetcy. Would it not satisfy you?"

"You can see her if you will," was Sir William's answer, but there was the same sad kind of denial in his manner. "I would not say No now for your father's sake. She is in the drawing-room. Upstairs, front room. I will join you as soon as I have written a note."

Arthur found his way to it by instinct. Ellen was lying back in an easy chair; the brilliant light of the chandelier shining on her face. Opening the door softly, it—that face—was the first object that struck his sight. And he started back from it in a kind of amazed terror.

Was it *death* that he saw written there? All too surely the conviction came home to him.

Oh! but it was a more momentous interview than the one just over. Explaining he knew not how, explaining he knew not what, save that his love had never left her, Arthur Bohun knelt at her feet, and they mingled their sobs together. For some minutes neither could understand the other: but elucidation came at last. Arthur told her that the wicked tale, the frightful treachery which had parted them was but a concocted fable on his mother's part, and then he found that Ellen had never known anything about the tale.

"What then did you think was the matter with me?" he asked.

And she told him. She told him without reserve, now that she found how untrue it was: she thought he had given her up for another. Madam had informed her he was about to marry Miss Dallory.

He took in the full sense of what the words implied: of the very abject light in which his conduct must have appeared to her. Going to marry Mary Dallory! A groan burst from him: he covered his face to hide its shame and trouble.

"Ellen! Ellen! You *could* not have thought it of me."

"It was what I did think. How was I to think anything else? Your mother said it."

"Lord forgive her her sins!" he wailed, in his despair. Ellen hid her face.

"It was enough to kill you, Ellen. No wonder you look like this."

She was panting a little. Her breath seemed very short.

"Pray Heaven I may be enabled to make it up to you when you are my wife. I will try hard, my darling."

"I shall not live for it, Arthur."

A spasm took his heart. The words struck him as being so very real.

"Arthur, I have known it for some time now. You must not grieve for me. I think even that death is rather near."

"What has killed you? I?"

A flush passed over her wan face. Yes, he had killed her. That is, his conduct had: the sensitive crimson betrayed it.

"I suppose the fact is, I should not in any case have lived long," she said, aloud. "I believe they feared something of the kind for me years ago. Arthur, don't! Don't weep; I cannot bear it."

Sir William Adair had just told him how his father had wept in *his* misery. And before Arthur could well collect himself, Sir William entered.

"You see," he whispered aside to Arthur, "why it may not be. There will be no marriage for her in this life. I am not surprised. I seem to have expected it always: my wife, her mother, died of decline."

Arthur Bohun quitted the house, overwhelmed with shame and sorrow. What regret is there like unto that for past mistaken conduct which can never be repaired, never remedied in this world?

CHAPTER XLV.

NO HOPE.

ONCE more, and for good, does the scene change to Dallory.

Seated on the lawn-bench at Dallory Hall in the sweet spring sunshine—for the time has again gone on—was Ellen Adair. Sir William Adair and Arthur Bohun were pacing amidst the flower-beds that used to be Mr. North's. Arthur stooped and plucked a magnificent pink hyacinth.

"It is not treason, sir, is it?" he asked, smiling.

"What is not treason?" returned the elder man.

"To pick this."

"Pick as many as you like," said Sir William.

"Mr. North never liked us to pluck his flowers. Now and then Madam would make a ruthless swoop upon them for her entertainments. It grieved his heart bitterly: and I think that was whence we got an idea that he did not like us to pluck them."

"No wonder," said Sir William.

The restoration to the old happiness, the clearing-up of the dreadful cloud that had so fatally told upon her, seemed to infuse new vigour

into Ellen's shortening span of life. With the exception of her father, everybody thought she was recovering: the doctors admitted, rather dubiously, that it "might be." She got wonderfully well through the winter, went out and about almost as of old; and when more genial weather set in, it was suggested by friends that she should be taken to a warmer climate. Ellen opposed it; it would be of no avail she knew, perhaps only hasten on the end; and after a private interview Sir William had with the doctors, *he* did not second it. Her great wish was to go to Dallory: and arrangements for their removal thither were made.

Dallory Hall was empty, and Sir William found that he could occupy it for the present if he pleased. Mr. North had removed to the house that had been Mrs. Cumberland's, leaving his own furniture (in point of fact it was Richard's) at the Hall, hoping the next tenant, whoever that might prove to be, would take to it. Miss Dallory seemed quite undecided what to do with the Hall, whether to let it for a term again, or not. But she was quite willing that Sir William Adair should have it for a month or two.

And so he came down with Ellen, bringing his servants. This was only the third day after their arrival, and Mr. Arthur Bohun had arrived. Sir William had told him he might come when he would.

What boots it to tell of the interview between Arthur Bohun and his mother? It was of a painful character. There was no out-spoken reproach, there was no loud voice raised. In a subdued manner, striving all the while for calmness, Arthur told her she had wilfully destroyed both himself and Ellen Adair; her life, for she was dying; his happiness. He recapitulated all that had been disclosed to him relating to his father's death; and Madam, brought to bay, never denied its accuracy.

"But that I dare not presume deliberately to fly in the face of one of Heaven's express Commandments, I would now cast you off for ever," he concluded in his bitter pain. "Look upon you again as my mother, I cannot. I will help you when you need help; so far will I act the part of a son to you; but all respect for you has been forced out of me; and I would prefer that we should not meet very often."

Madam went off the same day to Germany, Matilda and Parrit, the maid, in her wake. Letters came from her to say she should never go back to Dallory, never; probably never set her foot on British soil again; and therefore she desired that a suitable income might be secured to her abroad.

And so Mr. North had his new residence all to himself—save for Richard. Jelly had taken up her post as his housekeeper, general manager, and upper servant; with a boy and a maid under her; and there was one out-door gardener. All of whom she domineered over to her heart's content. Jelly was regaining some of her lost flesh, and

more than all her lost spirits. Set at rest, in a confidential interview with Mr. Richard, as to the very tangible nature of the apparition she had seen, Jelly was herself again.

And that's all that need be said of the changes just yet.

"Ellen looks much better, sir," remarked Arthur Bohun, as he twirled the pink hyacinth he had plucked.

"A little fresher, perhaps, from the country air," answered Sir William.

"I have not lost hope : she may be mine yet," he murmured.

Sir William did not answer. He would give her to Arthur now with his whole will and heart, had her health permitted it. Arthur himself looked ill ; in the last few months he seemed to have aged years. An awful amount of remorse was ever upon him ; his life, in its unavailing regret, seemed to be one long agony.

They turned across to where she was sitting. "Would you not like to walk a little, Ellen ?" asked her father.

She rose at once. Arthur held out his arm, and she took it. Sir William was quite content that it should be so : Arthur, and not himself. The three paced the lawn. Ellen wore a lilac silk gown and warm white burnouse cloak. An elegant girl yet, though worn nearly to a shadow, with the same sweet face as of yore.

But she was soon tired, and sat down again, Arthur by her side. One of the gardeners came up for some orders, and Sir William went away with him.

There was no one within view, and they sat, her hand clasped in his. The old expressive silence that used to lie between them of old, ensued now. They could not tell to each other more than they had told. In the most unexpected reconciliation that had come, in the bliss it brought, all had been disclosed. Arthur had heard all about her self-humiliation and anguish ; he knew of the treasured violets, and their supposed treachery : she had listened to his recital of the weeks of despair ; she had seen the letter, written to him from Eastsea, worn with his kisses, his tears, and kept in his bosom still. No : of the past there was nothing more to tell each other ; so far, they were at rest.

Arthur Bohun was still unconsciously twirling that pink hyacinth about in his fingers. Becoming awake to the fact, he offered it to her, putting it in her lap. A wan smile parted her lips.

"You should not have given it to me, Arthur."

"Why ?"

Ellen took it up and smelt it. The perfume was very strong.

"Why should I not have given it to you ?"

"Don't you know what the hyacinth is an emblem of ?"

"No."

"Death."

One quick, pained glance at her. She was smiling yet, and looking

rather fondly at the flower. Captain Bohun took both flower and hand into his.

"I always thought you liked hyacinths, Ellen."

"I have always liked them very much indeed. And I like the perfume—although it has something in it faint and sickly."

He quietly flung the flower on the grass, and put his boot on it to stamp out its beauty. A nearer emblem of death, now, than it was before : but he did not think of that.

"I'll find you a sweeter flower presently, Ellen. And you know——"

A visitor was crossing the lawn to approach them. It was Mary Dallory. She had not yet been to see Ellen. Something said by Mrs. Gass had sent her now. Happening to call on Mrs. Gass that morning, Mary heard for the first time of the love that had so long existed between Captain Bohun and Miss Adair ; that the course of the love had been forcibly interrupted by Madam, who had put forth the plea to Ellen that her son was engaged to Miss Dallory, and that—Mrs. Gass did not mince the matter—the trouble had killed her.

Mary Dallory felt her face grow hot and cold. She had been entirely innocent of ill intention ; but the words struck a strange chill of repentance to her heart.

"I—don't understand," she said to Mrs. Gass in a frightened tone. "Captain Bohun knew there was nothing between us ; that there was not the shadow of a pretence of it : why did he not tell her better ?"

"Because he and she had parted on another score ; they had been parted through a lie of Madam's, who wanted him to marry you. I don't rightly know what the lie was ; something frightfully grave ; something he could not repeat again to Miss Adair : and Ellen Adair never heard it, and thought it was as Madam said—that he had turned his love over to you."

Mary sat as one struck dumb, thinking of the past. There was a long pause.

"How did you get to know this ?" she breathed.

"Ah, well—partly through Mr. Richard. And I sat an hour talking with poor Miss Ellen yesterday, and caught a hint or two then."

"I will set it straight," said Mary, feeling, though without much cause, bitterly repentant. And she betook herself to the Hall there and then.

Just as Arthur Bohun had started back when he first saw Ellen in the winter, so did Miss Dallory start now. Wan and wasted ! ay, indeed. Mary felt half sick, to think what share she had held in it.

She said nothing at first. Room was made for her on the bench, and they talked of indifferent matters. Sir William came up and was introduced. Presently he and Arthur strolled to a distance.

Mary spoke then. Just a word or two, she said, of the misapprehension that had existed ; and burst forth into her exculpation.

"Ellen, I would have died rather than have caused you pain. Oh if I had but known! Arthur and I were familiar with each other as brother and sister: never a thought of aught else was in our minds. If I let people think there was, why—it was done in a kind of coquetry. I had somebody else in my head, you see, all the while; and that's the truth. And I am afraid I enjoyed the disappointment, that would ensue for Madam."

Ellen smiled faintly. "It seems to have been a complication altogether. A kind of ill-fate that I suppose there was no avoiding."

"You must get well, and be his wife."

"Ay. I wish I could."

But none could be wishing that as Arthur was. Hope deceived him; he confidently thought that a month or two would see her his. Just for a few days the deceitful improvement in her continued.

One afternoon they drove to Dallery churchyard. Ellen and her father, Arthur sitting opposite them in the carriage. A fancy had taken her that she would once more look on Mrs. Cumberland's grave; and Sir William said he should like to see it.

The marble stone was up now, with its inscription, "Fanny, widow of the Reverend George Cumberland, Government Chaplain, and daughter of the late William Gass, Esq., of Whitborough." There was no mention of her marriage to Captain Rane. Perhaps Dr. Rane fancied the name was not in very good odour just now, and so omitted it. The place where the ground had been disturbed, to take up those other coffins, had been filled in again with earth.

Ellen drew Sir William's attention to a green spot near, overshadowed by the drooping branches of a tree that waved its leaves in the breeze, and flickered the grass beneath with ever-changing light and shade.

"It is the prettiest spot in all the churchyard," she said, touching his arm. "And yet no one has ever chosen it."

"It is very pretty, Ellen; but solitary."

"Will you let it be here, papa?"

He understood the soft whisper, and slightly nodded, compressing his lips. Sir William was not deceived. Years had elapsed, but, to him, it seemed to be his wife's case over again. There had been no hope for her; there was none for Ellen.

Back in an easy chair she lay, in the little room that was once Mr. North's parlour. The window was flung open to the sweet flowers, to the balmy air; and Ellen Adair drank in alike their beauty and their perfume.

She took to this room as her own sitting-room the day she came back. She liked it. Sir William, seeing that, had caused the shabby old carpet and chairs and tables to be put out, and fresh and bright

furniture brought in. How willingly, had it been possible, would he have kept her in life!

Just for a few days had hope lasted—no more. The change in her had come on suddenly, and was unmistakeable. The wan face was very sweet still, the soft brown eyes had all their old lustre. Very listless was the worn white hand lying on her lap; loosely sat the plain gold ring on it—the ring that, through all the toil and trouble, had never been taken off. Ellen was alone. Sir William had gone by appointment to see over Richard North's works.

Captain Bohun came in at the glass doors, knowing he should probably find her in the room. He had been to London. His joyous smile died away when he saw her face. His step halted; his already held-out hand dropped at his side.

"Ellen!"

In a startled, wailing tone was the word spoken. Only three days' absence, and she had faded like this! Was it a relapse?—or what had she been doing to cause the change?

For a few minutes, perhaps neither of them was sufficiently collected to know what passed. In his shock of abandonment, he knelt by the chair, holding her hands; his eyes dropping tears. The remorse ever gnawing at his heart was very cruel just then. Ellen bent towards him, and whispered that he must be calm—must bear like a man: things were but drawing a little nearer.

"I should have been down yesterday, but that I waited in town to make sundry purchases and preparations," he said. "Ellen, I thought that—perhaps—next month—your father would have given you over to me."

"Did you?" she faintly answered.

"You must be mine," he continued, in too deep emotion to weigh his words. "If you were to die first, I—I think it would kill me."

"Look at me," was all she answered. "See whether it is possible."

"There's no knowing. It might restore you. The fresh scenes, the warm pure climate that I would take you to—we'd find one somewhere—might do wonders. I pointed this out to Sir William in the winter. Why, you know; you know that you were almost my wife. Half an hour later, and you would have been."

She released one of her hands, and hid her face upon it. Captain Bohun grew more earnest in his pleading; he was really thinking this thing might be.

"I shall declare the truth to Sir William Adair—and I know that I ought to have done so before, Ellen."

She had put down her hand again, and was looking at him, a little startled and her cheeks hectic.

"Arthur, hush. Papa must never know this while I live. I should die with the shame."

"What shame?"

"The shame that fell upon me. The shame of—after having consented to a secret marriage, you should have left me as you did, and not fulfilled it, and never told me why. It lies upon me still, and I cannot help it. I think it is that that has helped to kill me more than all the rest. Oh, Arthur, forgive me for saying this! Do not you renew the shame now."

Never had his past conduct been brought so forcibly home to him. Never had his heart so ached with its repentant pain. He stood up and laid her face upon his breast, and the scalding tears fell from his eyes upon it.

"The fear lest the secret should be discovered lay upon me always," she whispered. "While I was staying here that time, it seemed to me one long mental torment, a pain of prolonged crucifixion. Had the humiliation come, I could never have borne it. Spare me still, Arthur."

Every word she spoke was like a dagger thrusting its sharp point into his heart. *She* was going—going rapidly—where neither pain nor humiliation could reach her. But he had, in all probability, a long life before him, and must live out his bitter repentance.

"Oh, my love, my love! I wish I could die for you!"

"Don't grieve, Arthur; I shall be better off. You and papa must comfort one another."

He was unconsciously turning round the plain gold ring on her wasted hand, a sob now and again breaking from him. How real the past was seeming to him; even the hour when he had put that ring on, and the words he spoke with it, were very present. What remained of it all? Nothing, save that she was dying.

"I should like to give you this key now, while I am well enough to remember," she suddenly said, detaching a small key from her watch-chain. "It belongs to my treasure-box, as I used to call it at school. They will give it you when I am dead."

"Oh, Ellen!"

"The other ring is in it, and the licence—for I did not burn it, as you bade me that day in the churchyard; and the two or three letters you ever wrote me; and my journal, and some withered flowers, and other foolish trifles. You can do what you like with them, Arthur; they will be yours then. And oh, Arthur! if you grieve any more now, like this, you will hurt me, for I cannot bear that you should suffer pain. God bless you, my darling, my almost husband! We should have been very happy with one another."

Lower and lower he bent his aching brow, striving to suppress the anguish that went well-nigh to unman him. Her own tears were falling.

"Be comforted," she whispered; "Arthur, be comforted! It won't be for so many years, even at the most; and then we shall be together again, in Heaven!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

CONCLUSION.

THE genial spring gave place to a fiery summer ; and summer, in its turn, was giving place to autumn. There is nothing of much note to record of the interval ; just a passing word of gossip here and there.

Dallory, as regards North Inlet, was no longer a crowded place. The poor workmen, with their wives and families, had mostly drifted away from it ; some few were emigrating, some had brought their minds (or, as they expressed it, their stomachs) to accept that last and hated refuge, the workhouse ; and they seemed likely, so far as present prospects looked, to be permanent recipients of its hospitality. The greater portion, however, had wandered away to different parts of the country, seeking for that employment they could no longer get in their native place. Poole and the other conspirators had been tried at the March assizes. Richard North pleaded earnestly for a lenient sentence on them ; and he was listened to. Poole got a term of penal servitude, shorter than it would otherwise have been, and the others hard labour. One and all, including Mr. Poole, declared that they would not willingly have injured Richard North.

So, what with one thing and another, North Inlet had too much room in it, and was now at peace. There was no longer any need of special policemen. As to Richard, he was going on steadily and quietly ; progressing a little, not much. Some five or six men had been added to his small number, of whom Ketlar was one ; Ketlar having, as Jelly said, come to his senses. But the works would never be what they had been. For one thing, Richard had not capital ; and if he had, perhaps he might not now have cared to embark it. Provided he could gain a sufficient income for expenses, and employ his time and energies, it was all he asked.

Madam lived abroad permanently. Mr. North (Richard really) allowed her two hundred a year ; her son Arthur two ; Sir Nash two. Six hundred a year ; but it was pretty plainly intimated to Madam that this income was only guaranteed so long as she kept herself aloof from them. Madam retorted that she liked the Continent too well to leave it for snuffy old England.

Matilda North had married a French count, whom they had met at Baden-Baden. She, herself, made the announcement to her step-brother Arthur in a self-possessed letter, telling him that as the Count's fortune was not equal to his merits, she should depend upon him (Arthur) to assist them yearly. Sidney North had also married. Tired, possibly, with his most uncertain existence, finding supplies from home were now the exception rather than the rule, and not daring to show his face on English soil to entreat for more, Mr. Sidney North entered into the bonds of matrimony with a wealthy American dame who was a

few years older than himself ; the widow of a great man who had made his fortune by the oil springs. It was to be hoped he would keep himself straight now.

And Mr. North, feeling that he was securely freed from Madam, was happy as a prince, and confidentially told people that he thought he was growing young again. Bessy wrote to him weekly ; pleasant, happy letters. She liked her new home in the new world very much indeed ; and she said Oliver seemed not to have a single care. The new firm, Jones and Rane, had more patients than they could well attend to, and all things were well with them. In short, Dr. and Mrs. Rane were evidently both prosperous and happy. No one was more pleased to know this than Mrs. Gass. *She* flourished ; and her beaming face was more beaming than ever when seen abroad, setting the wives of Richard North's workmen to rights, or looking out from behind her geraniums.

Dallory Hall was empty again. William Adair had quitted it, his mission there over. Richard North was thinking about removing the furniture out ; but in truth he did not know what to do with it. There was no hurry ; for Miss Dallory said she did not intend to let it again at present.

Perhaps the only one not just now in a state of bliss, was Jelly. Jelly had made a frightful discovery of iniquity—Tim Wilks was faithless, and was going to marry Molly Green.

And that is how matters were at present in Dallory.

One autumn day, when the woods were glowing with their many colours, and the guns might be heard making war on the partridges, Richard North overtook one of his Flemish workmen at the base of a hill about half a mile from his works. The man was wheeling a wheelbarrow that contained sand, but not in the handy, ready manner that an Englishman would, and Richard took it himself.

"Can't you learn, Snaude?" he said, addressing the man by name. "Look here ; you should stoop : you must not get the barrow nearly upright. See how you've spilt the sand."

Wheeling it along and paying attention to nothing else, Richard took no notice of a basket-carriage that was clattering down the opposite hill. It pulled up when it reached him. Looking up Richard saw Miss Dallory. Giving the wheelbarrow over to the man, Richard took the hand she held out.

"Yes," he said, laughing, "you stop to shake hands with me now, but you won't do it soon."

"No? Why not?" she questioned.

"You saw me wheeling the barrow along?"

"Yes. It did not look very heavy."

"I have to put my hands to all sorts of things now, you perceive, Miss Dallory."

"Just so. I hope you like doing it."

"Well, I do."

"But I want to know what you mean by saying I shall soon not stoop to speak to you."

"When you become a great lady. Report says you are about to marry."

"Does it? Do you still think, sir, I am going to take a Bohun?"

"There has been some lord down at your brother's place, once or twice. The gossips in Dallory say that he comes for you."

"Then you can tell the gossips that they are a great deal wiser than I am. Stand still, Gyp"—to the shaggy pony. "I would not have him; and I'm sure he has not the remotest idea of having me. Why, he is hardly out of his teens. I daresay he thinks me old enough to be his godmother."

Miss Dallory played with the reins, and then glanced at Richard. He was looking at her earnestly, as he leaned on the side of the low carriage.

"That young man has come down for the shooting, Mr. Richard. Frank takes him out to it every day. As for me, I do not intend to marry at all. Never."

"What shall you do then?"

"Live at Dallory Hall. Frank *is* going to be married, to the lord's sister. Now there's some information for you, but you need not proclaim it. It is true. I shall remove myself and my bundles to the Hall, and live in it till I die."

"It will be very lonely for you."

"Yes, I know that," she answered in a sad tone. "Most old maids are lonely. There will be Frank's children, perhaps, to come and stay with me sometimes."

Their eyes met. Each understood the other as exactly as though a host of words had been spoken. She would have *one* man for a husband—if he would have her.

Richard went nearer. His lips were pale, his tones hoarse with emotion.

"Mary, it would not be suitable. Think of your money; your birth. I told you once before not to tempt me. Why you know—you *know* that I have loved you, all along, too well for my own peace. In the old days when those works of ours"—pointing to the distant chimneys—"were of note, and we wealthy, I allowed myself to cherish dreams that I should be ashamed to confess to: but that's all over and done with. It would not be suitable now."

She blushed, and smiled; and turned her head away from him to study the opposite hedge while she spoke.

"For my part, I think there was never anything so suitable since the world was made."

"Mary, I cannot."

"If you will please get off my basket-chaise, sir, I'll drive on."

But he did not stir. Miss Dallory played with the reins again.

"Mary, *how* can I? If you had nothing, it would be different. I cannot live at Dallory Hall."

"No one else ever shall." But Richard had to bend to catch the whisper.

"The community would cry shame upon me. Upon the poor man of work, Richard North."

"How dare you call yourself names, Mr. Richard? You are a gentleman."

"What would John and Francis say?"

"What they pleased. Francis likes you better than anybody in the world; better than—well, yes, sir—than I do."

He had one of her hands now. She knew, she had known a long while, how it was with him—that he loved her passionately, but would never, under his altered circumstances, tell her so. And, moreover, she knew that he was aware she knew it.

"But, Mary, since—since before you returned from Switzerland up to this hour, I have not dared to think the old hopes could be carried out, even in my own heart."

"You think it better that I should grow into an old maid, and you into an old bachelor. Very well. Thank you. Perhaps we shall both be happier for it. Let me drive on, Mr. Richard."

He drew her nearer; he made her turn to him. The great love of his heart shone in his face and eyes. A face of emotion then. She dropped the reins, regardless of what the rough pony might please to do, and put her other hand upon his.

"Oh, Richard, don't let us carry on the farce any longer! We have been playing it all these months and years. Let us at least be honest with each other; and then, if you decide for separation, why—it must be so."

But, as it seemed, Richard did not mean to decide for separation. He glanced round to make sure that nobody was in the lonely road, and, drawing her face to his, left some strangely ardent kisses on it.

"I could not give up my works, Mary."

"Nobody asked you to, sir."

"It is just as though I had left the furniture in the Hall for the purpose."

"Perhaps you did."

"Mary!"

"There's the pony going. Stand still, Gyp. I won't give up Gyp, mind, Richard. I know he is frightfully ragged and ugly, and that you despise him more than tongue can tell; but I won't give him up. He can be the set-off bargain against your works, sir."

"Agreed," answered Richard, laughing. And he chose to seal the bargain.

Mary said again that she must drive on; and did not. How long they would really have stayed it was impossible to say, but for the man's coming back from the works with the empty wheelbarrow for more sand.

And there's no more to say. When the next spring came round, Richard North and his wife were established at Dallory Hall. Somewhere about the time of the marriage, there occurred a little warfare. Mary, who owned a great nest of accumulated money, wanted Richard to take it for his business. Richard steadily refused. A small portion would be useful to him; that he would take, but no more.

"Richard," she said to him one day, before they had been married a week, "I do think you are more obstinate upon this point than any other. You should hear what Mrs. Gass says about it."

"She says it to me," returned Richard, laughing. "There's not my equal for obstinacy in the world, she tells me."

"And you know there's not, sir."

But the next minute he put aside lightness and grew strangely serious. "I cannot give up business, Mary; I have already said so—"

"I should despise you if you did, Richard," she interrupted. "I have money and gentility—I beg you'll not laugh, sir; you have work, and brains to work with; so we are equally matched. But I wish you'd take the money."

"No," said Richard. "I will never again enter on gigantic operations, and be at the beck and call of the Trades' Unions. There's another reason against it—that it would require larger supervision on my part. And as I have now divided duties to attend to, I shall not increase them. I should not choose to neglect my works; I should not choose to neglect my wife."

"A wilful man must have his way," quoth Mary.

"And a wilful woman shall have hers in all things, save when I see that it would not be for her good," rejoined Richard, holding his wife before him by the waist.

"I daresay I shall!" she saucily answered. "Is that a bargain, Richard?"

"To be sure." And Richard sealed it as he had the other one some months before.

And so we leave Dallory and its people at peace. Even Jelly was in feather. Jelly, ruling Mr. North indoors, and giving her opinion, unasked, in a free and easy manner whenever she chose, as to the interests of the garden (which opinion poor Mr. North enjoyed instead of reproved, and grew to look for). Jelly had taken on another "young man," in the person of Mr. Francis Dallory's head gardener. He was a staid young Scotchman; very respectful to Jelly, and quite attentive.

Mr. Seeley had moved into Dr. Rane's old house, and old Phillis was his housekeeper; so that Jelly's neighbourly relations with the next door were continued as usual.

On Arthur Bohun there remained the greatest traces of the past. Sir Nash was restored to health; and Arthur, in his never-ceasing remorse, would sometimes hope that he would marry again: he should almost hate to succeed to the rank and wealth to which he had, in a degree, sacrificed one who had been far dearer to him than life. Arthur's ostensible home was with Sir Nash; but he was fond of coming to Dallory. He had stayed twice with Mr. North: and Richard's home, the Hall, would be always open to him. The most bitter moments of Arthur Bohun's life were those that he spent with Sir William Adair: never could he get rid of the consciousness of having wronged him, of having helped to make him childless. Sir William had grown to love him as a son—which was but an additional stab for Arthur's aching heart.

And whenever Arthur Bohun came to Dallory, he would pay a visit to a certain white tomb in the churchyard. Choosing a solitary evening for it, after dusk had fallen, and staying by it for hours, there he indulged his dreadful grief. Who can tell how he called upon her?—who can tell how he poured out all the misery of his repentant heart, praying to be forgiven? Neither she nor Heaven could answer him in this world. She was gone; gone; all his regret was unavailing to recal her: there remained nothing but the marble stone, and the simple name on it:

“ELLEN ADAIR.”



THE SONGSTRESS WITH THE GOLDEN GIRDLE.*

I.

HOW THE GIRDLE WAS WON.

A SWEDISH autumn in the eleventh century. There were no merry harvest songs that year in the province of Smoland: a sadness and silence reigned upon the country, and on the Day of Rest the very bells were still. For the men of Smoland were gone to meet an enemy upon their eastern coast. Not one was left behind who was able to bear arms; only the old, old men sat in the rare bleak sunshine of that chilly clime, and shook their ancient heads over the dangers which their brave sons had gone to meet, and taught their tiny grandchildren to mimic in their games the actions which might be demanded of them in fatal earnest how few years hence!

But the work was not undone. The scanty corn was not permitted to drop over-ripe from its husks, nor to rot in the later rains. There were still strong arms in Smoland; strong with a force of will which supplied the lack in nerve and sinew.

Now that their fathers, husbands, lovers, were away, shedding their dear blood to preserve their homes from risk and insult, the women of Smoland rose up as one to do the toil which their protectors had been forced to leave.

A tall, dark woman, with an earnest face, stood resting at the setting of the sun, her left hand holding the sickle placed upon her hip, her stately form bent back, her right hand—large, strong, and shapely—shading her eyes from the mellow gleam as she looked across the river to some low, blue hills. On a sudden, her gaze became more intense, she bent eagerly forward with parted lips; a figure with fluttering robes came rushing down those slopes, after appearing for one moment on the summit, a black speck against the mellow sky. As it drew nearer, the watcher saw that a shapeless rag waved over the comer's shoulder, and when still nearer she fancied this rag was red: a danger signal. A strange cry drew round her the other women, who were preparing to leave their toil, chattering and even laughing with the ease of their lighter natures.

"What is it, Blinda?"

"Danger!" said Blinda, sternly. "Come!"

She ran towards the messenger, and the others followed, more or less swiftly, as they could. The foremost were in time to see the meeting.

* This paper is entirely founded on fact.

"What is it, sister? Tell the worst at once," from Blinda.

Drawing her breath in sobs, her whole body panting with exhaustion, the woman cried :

"They are on us—the Danes are on us—to the south. There is no one left to defend us. They take what they will—do what they will ; they march on as swiftly as the raven flies, and call themselves our conquerors."

"The cowards!" muttered Blinda. "Would they make war on a flock of lambs?"

"They laugh and say, let the women defend themselves!"

"And they shall," said Blinda, in a deep, strange voice. "When may the Danes be here?"

"In two days at the farthest."

"We will be ready."

"But we cannot recall our men."

"We will be ready."

In two days' time the renowned Tumlinger stood with his Danish host on the top of that low ridge. The procession was loose and gay : there were light snatches of song, and mocking mirth was on every face. It was a revel rather than a war. In the pride of easy conquest, Tumlinger gazed on the fair valley before him, and the village roofs among their trees. He turned to one of his captains—

"This will be a pleasant spot to conquer, I predict. And see, what troop of fair captives comes yonder, only too willing to be taken by the gallant Danes!"

He laughed, pointing to a line of figures ascending the hill, clad in their festal dresses, with wreaths of flowers on their heads. It was a troop of handsome women, and Blinda at their head, stately as a queen, bearing on her arm a bundle of corn, in sign of peace and plenty. Tumlinger hastened to meet them, with an insolent admiration in his eye ; and his men followed, laughing and jesting with one another. Deeply bowing, with eyes cast down, as in great humility, to hide the gleam within them, Blinda drew near, and stood before the Danish general.

"Welcome, fair lady," he said ; "here are such prisoners as brave soldiers love indeed. But the danger is great, for the leader is already vanquished."

"My lord," said Blinda, in a subdued tone, sweet as honey, soft as cream ; "we come, in deep humility, to own your might and your conquest of our land ; and in sign of homage, we pray with all lowliness that you, my lord, and your brave soldiers, would honour a simple feast which the women of Smoland have prepared for you, and where many, with whom none of us can compare, are awaiting your coming to divide the portions, and to pour the wine."

"My men," cried Tumlinger, "you have heard. A feast is prepared

for us by the whitest hands in Smoland. We go with you, lady, to do honour to your cheer; but we go hand-in-hand, and I beg one flower from that garland in earnest that you will be my companion at the meal."

He took it as he spoke. There was one sudden flash from those dark eyes of Blinda's; but in the next moment her face wore a smile, and she led on her guest with the most graceful humility. The other leaders chose companions from the band of women, and so the army came into the valley.

A woodland path opened suddenly on a vast green space, where the pleasant grass, through which flowed a brook as clear as crystal, was surrounded on all sides by densest forest trees. The sunny space of grass was more attractive than their gloomy depths, sprinkled, too, as it was, by tables covered with meats, and flasks of wine, and heaps of cooling fruits. The eyes of the Dane glistened as he saw these tokens of a luxury unexpected in this remote province.

"Madam," he said, "I am surely in the Walhalla dreamed of by the ancients."

"Maybe, my lord," she answered, with a flattering smile; "for that, too, was the rest assigned to valiant warriors. A first cup to the hopes of peace!"

"Peace like this is all I ask," replied the general; and that one cup was followed by many another, and by delicate viands heaped up by ready hands, while smiling lips invited to indulgence.

The feast went on with tumultuous mirth, and when at last the dishes were almost emptied, the soldiers lay down on the grass to rest, each with a maiden at hand to pour out more of that rich, heavy wine. Then the women sang sweet songs of their own land; and with music and wine the eyes of the men grew drowsy, and one by one they fell asleep. The evening was drawing on, but they were not chilly, for the women covered them warmly in large cloaks. The eye-lids of the general were closing to the sound of a low and dreamy chorus, when a soldier near him broke upon the harmony with a sudden cry:

"My lord, the forest is closing upon us!"

"Silence, fool!"

"My lord, it *is*! Look, look for yourself."

Tumlinger idly began to rise.

"My lord," said Blinda, softly, "would you disturb yourself for a drunken man's vision? Be content; drain this last cup which I have poured out for you. Olga has one to give *him* better dreams."

The soldier was silenced, and the soothing chorus began again. One by one the men sank to sleep: the shades closed in: the forest trees seemed to draw closer and closer around the scene of that festivity. Blinda watched them with eyes which seemed to glow in the darkness, until one could have said that the leaves were rustling close around the tables.

Then with a sudden cry, wild and shrill as that of the eagle, Blinda sprang up; the branches dropped, and an army of women stood behind, their sickles, scythes, and axes gleaming in the rays of the rising moon. Then there were cries of treachery, and curses of despair, and rattle of steel on steel. Many of those brave women shed their blood upon that plain; but one by one the Danish men were hewn down, and Sweden was saved by her daughters!

Blinda gave half the booty to her sister warriors, and with the rest founded a church that "standeth to this day," and in memory of her is called Blindinger. And thus a woman painted in action a pendant to that great picture of the same century, where "Birnam wood did come to Dunsinane."

The king of Sweden gave to the heroines of this province privileges which the centuries have respected; they could inherit equally with male heirs; at their weddings, they rode to church to the music of a drum; they were buried with military honours, and to all of them it was permitted to wear, as a token of this brave action, a girdle embroidered in gold and silver, which passes down for ages from mother to daughter. And this was the girdle which they won.

II.

THE SWEET SINGER OF SMOLAND.

EIGHT centuries had passed away; a peasant woman of that ennobled race was sitting beside a Swedish lake in an afternoon of the sweet, short, northern summer. Her fingers were busy with a mat, which she was plaiting from the rushes which grew on the borders of the water, and which her little daughter had gathered for her. There was a smile on the woman's face as she let her eyes rove from her mechanical work to the shimmering mere, with its low hills, and the heather and grass stretching round about in broad surfaces of pleasant varied colour. A sweet, wild, plaintive strain seemed to fuse and steep the scene in peace. The little child, sitting near her on a tiny knoll, was pouring forth one of her country's songs in a rich, clear, bird-like voice. Upon her shoulder lay a little violin, and she was accompanying herself upon it with a skill marvellous at her age. The mother listened with a proud pleasure. "Certainly, the good God has given me a wonderful little daughter," she thought; "there is not one of the children about us who has so much music in her, or so sweet a face," she added; and she was right. The child had the fascinating, piquant features, and the long, bright, waving hair of a cherub by Correggio, and as her face was lighted by her love of song, a very Correggio might have yearned to paint it.

The music flowed gaily on. Suddenly, there was a sound of wheels upon the road behind. The mother, glancing round, saw a carriage

approaching ; but the child was too deeply absorbed to heed it. The vehicle drew near, and when close behind the pair, it was stopped by its occupant's command. She was a lady, richly dressed, and she sat leaning her chin upon her hand, and listening entranced to the tiny musician. A smile of sympathy passed between her and the mother. Suddenly the child perceived that she was watched, and dropped her violin with a start. Smiling, the lady descended from her carriage, and came towards the peasants.

"Your child is a marvel," she said to the woman. "Give her to me, and I will make her a Jenny Lind."

Jenny Lind ! That name, in Sweden, then meant all that was good, and great, and splendid.

"Oh, Madam ! Christine, hearest thou ? Since God has given thee the gift of thy voice, wilt thou go with this good lady ?"

The child looked gloomy, and only half comprehended. With pretty flatteries, the lady pressed her bounty. Suddenly, flinging her arms around her mother, the girl cried out with one deep sob—

"Mother, if you wish to send me away, I will throw myself into that water before us."

Half admiring, half offended, the lady was obliged to retract her sudden and benevolent scheme. The child clung, weeping and excited, to her mother, who, at once glad and sorry, said by-and-by :

"Be calm, Christine ; you shall never leave me till you wish to do so. That day will come, and then—go away without asking my leave, for I might not have the courage to give it."

Courage ! When was courage wanting to the women of Smoland—they who had the right to wear the Golden Girdle ? The mother would have found courage to send away her child, as the child, in after years, found courage to follow her fate afar.

Again, six years had passed, when, in the marketplace of a little Swedish town, a crowd was gathered round a young girl, whose sweet, clear voice rose high and true in the thrilling melodies of her nation, while her charming face gave almost as much pleasure to the eye as her voice to the ear. Her dress was that of a peasant, simple, and even coarse, but there were natural grace and *abandon* in her movements which marked her to be innately higher than the peasant grade. Beside her stood a boy, her brother ; the loving pride in his eyes was fine to see. The folk had left the gaudy trinkets on the stalls to look and listen. The girl ceased singing. Her brother held his hat. The big pence fell in, and rough, honest praise sounded on all sides. A tumbler in his quaint dress pushed through the throng.

"Little girl," he said, "come with me, and you shall have twenty riksdaler * yearly."

Dazzled by the splendid prospect, the child listened, when a man of

* About £1 5s. *od.*

higher rank, who had stood quietly among the throng, came forward and touched her on the arm.

"My child," he said, kindly, "you are not thus gifted in order to be one of a strolling company of merry-andrews. Come with me, and I will place you with a kind lady who adores music, and who will make you the wonder of Europe."

The girl raised her blue eyes trustingly to his face.

"My mother has always told me that God meant me to help my family by my voice. Will you teach me, sir, to do so?"

"I will, my child, and you shall find a happy home wherever you go."

She threw her arms around her brother's neck.

"Good-bye," she said. "Take the pence home to our mother, and tell her I shall soon be able to help her better; and do not forget to kiss her for me."

"But we must ask your mother's leave before you go," said her new-found friend.

"My mother told me, when the time was come for me to go, I should not ask her leave," replied Christine. "But if you, sir, will let me, I will write her a letter, which my brother will carry home."

"Then come, my child; so be it."

"And you are going, Christine!" said the boy, in tears. "And you will forget us all, and the happy evenings round the hearth."

"I am going because the time is come," she answered, with a grave sweetness; "and a Swedish girl can never forget her home."

In one of the most exquisite saloons of Paris, where a profusion of rich flowers, and soft, full light, and the tinkling fall of a scented fountain, and the brightness of perfect dress, made an artistic whole incomparable even in that world of luxury, stood a woman, young and very lovely, with the twinkling lustre of diamonds on her fair hair, and robed with almost eastern grace in the alternate cloud and gleam of antique lace and azure satin. All eyes were turned upon her. With the fine deference which betrays the old *noblesse*, one of France's greatest men had handed to her place the peasant maid; for it was she. A pianist struck an opening chord, and then the marvel of that voice rose full and entrancing, and rang throughout the spacious rooms. Wartel, her master, listened with eyes moist with pride and pleasure.

"Since the Trebelli, I have never had such a pupil. It is a joy in one's life," he murmured.

With the ease of a full-throated bird, singing because it is joyous, she gave the lavish delight to her listeners.

The song was ended. Amid the applause, a lady, than whom France contained none higher, came forward with a smile which only the great can use.

"Mademoiselle," she said, in the infinitely gracious accents of a high-bred woman, "accept a trifling souvenir of the happiness you have given to one who loves art dearly."

She transferred, as she spoke, a splendid jewel from her own arm to that of the songstress.

She, when her thanks were spoken, turned to a quiet recess, where sat an old man dressed in garments of the plainest black. His grand gray head and simple manners seemed scarcely in harmony with that brilliant scene. The songstress sat down on a low ottoman beside him, and taking his hand, smoothed it tenderly between her own.

"Father dear," she said, in her native Swedish tongue, "I am so proud and glad that you are here to see how good the world is to your Christine, who owes all to you."

"Child," answered the old man, "I am proud and thankful too; and most of all, that my girl, in her triumph, can remember her poor old peasant-father."

And Christine Nilsson, in all the flush of celebrity, has still and always this sweet rare womanly constancy to her early home; nor, in it all, is she ashamed to own her peasant birth, for she has the true pride of descent from those brave women who, centuries ago, won for themselves and their daughters the gold-embroidered girdle.

The old man had good cause for his honest pride in the conduct of his daughter. The first year's savings after her great success at the Théâtre Lyrique had been sent to Sweden to buy a small estate on which her parents could live in comfort, and now, with every thoughtful care, she had sent the English lady, who was her *chaperone* and companion, to fetch her dear old father to share for a short time her Parisian triumph. There he found her, respected by all, living as pure and simple a life as the first "Swedish Nightingale" who charmed the world, and practising a prudent economy, most rare with great musicians, to provide for the times of sickness, failure, and age.



WOLFE BARRINGTON'S TAMING.

I AM going back to our school life. That is, to something that happened in it. It may be considered a relief after that long rigmarole of Duffham's—A Tale of Sin. Not that Duffham's story was a bad one in itself, only the foreign diaries and things spun it out so. I asked Duffham afterwards whether he had a conscience: his answer was, that the history ought to have been made twice as long, and that many details had been cut out of it which might have been left in. That's true. But what will you?—as the French say. The magazine cannot give up all its pages to me on behalf of Duffham.

I might have told this long ago, and it has often crossed my mind to do it. But somehow I have not cared; for Archie Hearn and I were as great friends as young boys can be, and I liked him better than any other fellow in the school at that time, Tod always excepted. We had been a couple of years at Dr. Frost's when little Hearn entered. He was eleven years old then.

Hearn's father was dead. His mother had been a Miss Stockhausen, sister to Mrs. Frost. The Stockhausens had a name in Worcestershire: chiefly, I think, for dying off. There had been six sisters; and the only two now left were Mrs. Frost and Mrs. Hearn: the other four quietly decayed away one after another, not living to see thirty. Mr. Hearn died (from an accident) when Archie was only a year old. He left no will, and there ensued a sharp dispute about his property. The Stockhausens said it all belonged to the little son; the Hearn family considered a portion of it must go back to them. The poor widow was the only quiet spirit amidst them, willing to be led either way. What the disputants did was to put it into Chancery: and I don't much think it ever came out again.

It was the worst move they could have made for Mrs. Hearn. For it reduced her to a very slender income indeed, and the world wondered how she got on at all. She lived in a cottage about three miles off the Frosts, with one servant and the little child Archibald. In the course of years people seemed to forget all about the property in Chancery, and to ignore her as quite a poor woman.

Well, we—I and Tod—had been at Dr. Frost's two years or so, when Archibald Hearn entered the school. He was a slender little fellow with bright brown eyes, a delicate face and bright cheeks, very sweet-tempered and pleasant in manner. At first he used to go home at night, but when the winter weather came on he got a cough, and was told to come into the house altogether. Some of the big ones felt sure

that old Frost took him for nothing : but as little Hearn was Mrs. Frost's nephew and we liked *her*, no talk was made over it. The lad did not much like coming into the house : we could see that. He seemed always to be hankering after his mother and old Betty the servant. Not in words : but he'd stand with his arms on the play-yard gate, and his eyes gazing out to the quarter where the cottage was ; as if he'd like his sight to leap the wood and the three miles of distance, and take a look at it. When any of us said to him as a bit of chaff " You are staring after old Betty," he would say Yes, he wished he could see her and his mother ; and then tell no end of tales about what Betty had done for him in his illnesses. Any way, Hearn was a straightforward little chap, and a favourite in the school.

He had been with us about a year when Wolfe Barrington came. Quite another guess sort of pupil. A big strong fellow who had never had a mother : rich and overbearing, and cruel enough. He was in black from head to foot for his father, who had just died : a rich Irishman, given to company and strong drink. Wolfe came in for all the money ; so that he had a fine career before him and might be expected to set the world on fire. Little Hearn's stories had been of home ; of his mother and old Betty. Wolfe's were different. He had had the run of his father's stables and knew more about horses and dogs than the animals themselves. Curious things, too, he'd tell of men and women, who had stayed at old Barrington's place : and what he said of the public school he had been at, might have made old Frost's hair stand on end. Why he quitted the public school we did not find out : some said he had run away from it, and that his father, who'd indulged him awfully, would not send him back to be punished ; others said the public masters would not receive him back. In the nick of time the father died ; and Wolfe's guardians put him at Dr. Frost's.

" I shall make you my fag," said Barrington, the day he entered, catching hold of little Hearn in the playground, and twisting him round by the arm.

" What's that ? " asked Hearn, rubbing his arm—for Wolfe's grasp had not been a light one.

" What's that ! " repeated Barrington, scornfully. " What a precious young fool you must be, not to know. Who's your mother ? "

" She lives over there," answered Hearn, taking the question literally, and nodding beyond the wood.

" Oh ! " said Barrington, twisting his mouth. " What's her name ? And what's yours ? "

" Mrs. Hearn. Mine's Archibald. "

" Good, Mr. Archibald. You'll be my fag. That is, my servant. And you'll do every earthly thing that I order you to do. And mind you do it smartly, or may be that girl's face of yours will show out rather green sometimes. "

"I shall not be anybody's servant," returned Archie, in his mild, inoffensive way.

"Won't you! You'll tell me another tale before this time to-morrow. Did you ever get licked into next week?"

The child made no answer. He began to think the new fellow might be in earnest, and gazed up at him in questioning doubt.

"When your two eyes can't see out for the swelling round them, and your back's stiff with smarting and aching—*that's* the kind of licking I mean," went on Barrington. "Did you ever taste it?"

"No, sir."

"Good again. It'll be the sweeter when you do. Now look you here, Mr. Archibald Hearn. I appoint you my fag in ordinary. You'll fetch and carry for me: you'll black my boots and brush my clothes; you'll sit up to wait on me when I go to bed, and read me to sleep; you'll be dressed before I am in the morning, and be ready with my clothes and hot water. Never mind whether the rules of the house are against hot water, *you'll have to provide it*, though you boil it on sticks in the bedroom grate, or out in the nearest field. You'll attend me at my lessons; look out words for me; copy my exercises in a fair hand—and if you were old enough to *do* them, you'd have to. That's a few of the items; but there's a hundred other things, that I've not time to detail. If I can get a horse for my use, you'll have to groom him. And if you don't put out your mettle to serve me in all these ways, and don't hold yourself in readiness to fly and obey me at any minute or hour, you'll get one of the lickings I've told you of every day, until you are licked into shape."

Barrington meant what he said. Voice and countenance alike wore a carelessly determined look, as if his words were law. Lots of the fellows, attracted by the talking, had gathered round. Hearn, honest and straightforward himself, did not altogether understand what evil might be in store for him, and grew seriously frightened.

The captain of the school walked up—John Whitney. "What's that that Hearn has got to do?" he asked.

"*He* knows now," answered Barrington. "That's enough. They don't allow servants here: I must have a fag in place of one."

In turning his fascinated eyes from Barrington, Hearn saw Blair standing by—of whom you have heard before. Blair must have caught what passed: and little Hearn appealed to him.

"Am I obliged to be his fag, sir?"

Mr. Blair put us leisurely aside with his hands, and confronted the new fellow. "Your name is Barrington, I think," he said.

"Yes, it is," said Barrington, staring at him defiantly.

"Allow me to tell you that 'fags' are not permitted here. The system would not be tolerated by Dr. Frost for a moment. Each boy must wait on himself, and be responsible for himself: seniors and

juniors alike. You are not at a public school now, Barrington. In a day or two, when you shall have learnt the in-door customs and rules here, I daresay you will find yourself quite sufficiently comfortable, and that a fag would be an unnecessary appendage."

"Who is that man?" cried Barrington, as Blair turned away.

"Mathematical master. Sees to us out of hours," answered Bill Whitney.

"And what the devil did you mean by making a sneaking appeal to *him*?" continued Barrington, seizing Hearn roughly.

"I did not mean it for sneaking; but I could not do what you wanted," said Hearn. "He had been listening to us."

"I wish to goodness that confounded fool, Taptal, had been sunk in his horse-pond, before he had put me to such a place as this," cried Barrington passionately. "As to you, you little sneak, it seems I can't make you do what I wanted, fags being forbidden fruit here, but it sha'n't serve you much. There's to begin with."

Hearn got a shake and a kick that sent him flying. Blair was back on the instant.

"Are you a coward, Mr. Barrington?"

"A coward!" retorted Barrington, his eyes flashing. "You had better try whether I am or not."

"It seems to me that you act like one, in attacking a lad so much younger and weaker than yourself. Don't let me have to report you to Dr. Frost the first day of your arrival. Another thing—I must request you to be a little more careful in your language. You have come amidst gentlemen here, not blackguards."

The matter ended at this; but Barrington looked in a frightful rage. It was unfortunate that it should have occurred the day he entered; but it did, word for word, as I have written it. It set some of us rather against Barrington, and it set *him* against Hearn. He didn't "lick him into next week," but he gave him many a blow that the boy did nothing to deserve.

Barrington won his way, though, as the time went on. He had a large supply of money, and was open-handed with it; and he'd often do a generous turn for one and another. The worst of him was his savage roughness. At play he was always rough; and, when put out, savage as well. His strength and activity were something remarkable; he'd not have minded hard blows himself, and he showered them out on others with no more care than if we had been made of pumice-stone.

It was Barrington who introduced the new system at football. We had played it before in a rather mild manner, speaking comparatively, but he soon changed that. Dr. Frost got to know of it in time, and he appeared amongst us one day when we were in the thick of it, and stopped the game with a sweep of his hand. They play it at Rugby now very much as Barrington made us play it then. The Doctor—

standing with his face unusually red, and his shirt and necktie unusually white, and his knee-buckles shining—asked whether we were a pack of African cannibals, that we should kick at one another in that dangerous manner. If we ever attempted it again, he said, football should be interdicted.

So we went back to the old way. But we had tried the new, you see: and the consequence was that undue roughness would creep into it now and again. Barrington led it on. No African cannibal (as old Frost put it) could have been more incautiously furious at it than he. To see him with his sallow face in a steam, and his keen black eyes shining, his hat off, and his straight hair flung behind, was not the pleasantest sight to my mind. Snapp said one day that he looked just like the devil at these times. Wolfe Barrington overheard, and kicked him right over the hillock. I don't think he was ill-intentioned: but his powerful frame had been untamed; it required a vent for its superfluous strength: his animal spirits led him away, and he had never been taught to put a curb on himself or his inclinations. One thing was certain—that the name, Wolfe, for such a nature as his, was singularly appropriate. Some of us told him so. He laughed in answer: never saying that it was only so shortened from Wolfrey, which was his real name, as we learnt later. He could be as good a fellow and comrade as any of them when he chose, and on the whole we liked him a great deal better than we had thought we should at first.

As to the animosity against little Hearn, it was wearing off. The lad was too young to retaliate, and Barrington got tired of knocking him about: perhaps a little ashamed of it when there was no return. In a twelvemonth's time it had quite subsided: and, to the surprise of many of us, Barrington (coming back from a visit to his guardian, old Taptal) brought Hearn a handsome knife of three blades as a present.

And so it would have gone on but for an unfortunate occurrence. I shall always say and think so. But for that, it might have been peace between them to the end and the end. There's no space to give details just here; only the heads. Barrington, who was defiantly independent, had betaken himself to Evesham one half holiday without leave. He got into some mischief there, and broke a boy's head. Dr. Frost was appealed to: and of course there was a row. The Doctor forbid him ever to stir beyond bounds again without first obtaining permission; and told Mr. Blair that for a fortnight to come Barrington in after hours was to be confined to the playground.

Very good. A day or two after, on the next Saturday afternoon, the school went to a cricket-match; doctor, masters, boys, and all; Barrington only being left behind.

Was he one to stand this? No. He coolly walked away to the high road and took the first conveyance that passed for Evesham. There he

disported himself in the fruit and tart shops, and chartered a gig to bring him back to within half a mile of the school's entrance.

The cricket-match was not over when he got in, for it lasted up to the dark of the summer evening; and nobody would have known of the escapade but for one miserable misfortune—Archie Hearn happened to have been that afternoon at Evesham with his mother, and he saw Barrington.

"There's Wolfe Barrington!" said Archie in the surprise of the moment as he passed the tart shop: but Mrs. Hearn, who was in a hurry, did not stop. On the Monday, she brought Archie back to school; he had been at home, sick, for more than a week, and knew nothing of Barrington's punishment. Archie came amidst us at once, but Mrs. Hearn stayed to take tea with her sister and Dr. Frost. Without the slightest intention to create mischief, quite unaware that she was doing it, Mrs. Hearn mentioned incidentally that they had seen one of the boys—Barrington—at Evesham on the Saturday. Dr. Frost pricked up his ears at the news; not believing it, however: but Mrs. Hearn said yes, for Archie had seen him eating tarts at the confectioner's. The Doctor finished his tea, went to his study, and sent for Barrington. Barrington denied it. He was not in the habit of telling lies, was too fearless of consequences to do anything of the kind; but he denied it now to the Doctor's face; perhaps he began to think he might have gone a little too far. Dr. Frost rang the bell and ordered Archie Hearn in.

"Which shop was Barrington in when you saw him on Saturday?" questioned the Doctor.

"The pastry-cook's," said Archie innocently. "He was eating tarts."

Well—it all came out then. And though Archie was entirely innocent of wilfully telling tales, would have cut out his tongue rather than have said a word to harm Barrington, he got the credit for it now. Barrington took his punishment without a word: the hardest caning old Frost had given for many a long day, and heaps of work besides, and a promise of certain expulsion if he ever went off surreptitiously in gigs again. But Barrington thrashed Hearn worse when it was over, and branded him with the name of Tell-tale sneak.

"He'll never believe otherwise," said Archie, the tears of pain and mortification running down his cheeks, fresh and delicate as a girl's. "But I'd give the world not to have gone that afternoon to Evesham."

A week or two later we went in for a turn at "Hare and Hounds." Barrington's punishment was over then. Snapp was the hare: a fleet, wiry fellow who could outrun most of us. But the hare this time came to grief. After doubling and turning, as Snapp used to like to do, thinking to throw us off the scent, he sprained his foot, trying to leap a hedge and the dry ditch beyond it. We were on his trail, whooping and

halloaing like mad ; he kept quiet, and we passed on and never saw him. But there was no more scent (little pieces of white paper that Snapp had to let fall as he ran), and we saw we had lost it, and went back. Snapp showed himself then, and the sport was over for the day. Some went home one way and some another ; all of us were as hot as Jupiter, and thirsting for water.

"If you'll turn down here by the great oak-tree, we shall come to my mother's house, and you can have as much water as you like," said little Hearn in his good-nature.

So we turned down. There were but six or seven of us, for Snapp and his damaged foot made one, and most of them had gone on at a quicker pace. Tod helped Snapp on one side, Barrington on the other, he limping along between them.

It was a narrow red-brick house, a parlour window on each side the door, and three windows above ; small altogether, but very pretty with the jessamine and clematis climbing up the walls. Archie Hearn opened the door and we trooped in, without any regard to ceremony. Mrs. Hearn—she had the same delicate face that Archie had, the same rose-pink colour and bright brown eyes—came out of the kitchen to stare. As well she might. Her cotton gown sleeves were turned up to the elbows, her fingers were stained red, and she had a coarse kitchen cloth pinned round her. She was pressing black currants for jelly.

We got plenty of water. And Mrs. Hearn made Snapp sit down, and looked at his foot, and put a wet bandage round, kneeling before him to do it. I thought I had never seen so nice a face as hers ; very placid, with a kind of sad look in it. Old Betty, that Hearn used to talk about, appeared in a short blue petticoat and a sort of jacket of brown print. I have seen the homely servants in France, since, dressed very similar. Snapp thanked Mrs. Hearn for giving his foot relief, and we took off our hats to her as we went away.

That same night, before Blair called us in for prayers, Archie Hearn heard Barrington giving a sneering account of the visit to some of the fellows in the playground.

"Just like a cook, you know. Might be taken for one. Some coarse bunting tied round her middle, and hands steeped in kitchen stuff."

"My mother could never be taken for anything but a lady," spoke up Archie bravely. "A lady may make jelly. A great many of them prefer to do it."

"Now you be off," cried Barrington, turning on him sharply. "Keep at a distance from your betters."

"There's nobody in the world better than my mother," returned the boy, standing his ground. "Ask Joseph Todhetley what he thinks of her. Ask John Whitney. They recognize her for a lady."

"But then they are gentlemen, themselves."

It was I put in that. I couldn't help having a fling at Barrington. A bit of applause followed, and it stung him.

"If you shove in your oar, Johnny Ludlow, or presume to interfere with me, I'll pummel you to powder. There."

Barrington kicked out on all sides of him, sending us back. The bell rang for prayers then, and we had to go in.

The game the next evening was football. We went out to it as soon as tea was over, to the field by the river towards Vale Farm. I can't tell much about its progress, save that the play seemed rougher and louder than usual. Once there was a regular scrimmage: scores of feet kicking out at once; great struggling and pushing and shunting: and when the ball got off, and the tail after it in full hue and cry, one was left behind lying on the ground.

I don't know why I turned my head back; it was the merest chance. Tod was kneeling on the grass, raising the boy's head.

"Halloa!" said I, running back. "Anything amiss? Who is it?"

It was little Hearn. He had his eyes shut. Tod did not speak.

"What's the matter, Tod? Is he hurt?"

"Well, I think he's hurt a little," was Tod's answer. "He has got a kick here."

Tod touched the left temple with the point of his finger, and drew it down as far as the back of the ear, to indicate the part he meant. It must have been a good wide kick, I thought.

"It has stunned him, poor little fellow. Can you get some water from the river, Johnny?"

"I could if I had anything to bring it in. It would leak out of my hat long before I got here." For the hat was of straw.

But little Hearn made a move then, and opened his eyes. Presently he sat up, putting his hands to his head. Tod was as tender with him as a mother.

"How do you feel, Archie?"

"Oh, I'm all right, I think. A bit giddy."

Getting on his feet, he looked from me to Tod in a bewildered manner. I thought it odd. He said he'd not join the game again, but would go in and rest. Tod went with him. Hearn walked all right, and did not seem to be much the worse for it.

"What's the matter now?" asked Mrs. Hall, in her cranky way; for she happened to be in the yard when they got in, Tod marshalling little Hearn by the arm.

"He has had a blow at football," answered Tod. "Here"—showing the place he had shown me.

"A kick, I suppose you mean," said Mother Hall.

"Yes, if you like to call it so. 'Twas a blow with a foot."

"Did you do it, Master Todhetley?"

"No I didn't," retorted Tod.

"I wonder the Doctor allows that football to be played!" she went on, grumbling. "I wouldn't, if I kept a school; I know that. It is a barbarous, cruel game, fit only for bears."

"I am all right," put in Hearn. "I needn't have come in but for feeling giddy."

But he was not quite right yet. For without the slightest warning, before he had time to stir from where he stood, he became as sick as a dog. Hall ran for a basin and some warm water. Tod held his head.

"This is through having gobbled down your tea in such a mortal hurry to be off to that precious football," decided Hall resentfully. "The wonder is, that the whole crew of you are not sick, swallowing your food at the rate you do."

"I think I'll lie on the bed for a bit," said Archie, when the sickness had passed. "I shall be up again by supper time."

They went with him to his room. Neither of them had the slightest notion that he was hurt seriously, or that there could be any danger. Archie took off his jacket, and lay down in his other clothes. Mrs. Hall offered to bring him up a cup of tea; but he said it might make him sick again, and he'd rather be quiet. She went down, and Tod sat on the edge of the bed. Archie shut his eyes, and kept still. Tod thought he was dropping off to sleep, and began to creep out of the room. The eyes came open then, and Archie called to him.

"Todhetley?"

"I am here, old fellow. What is it?"

"You'll tell him I forgive him," said Archie, speaking in an earnest whisper. "Tell him I know he didn't think to hurt me."

"Oh, I'll tell him," answered Tod.

"And be sure give my dear love to mamma."

"So I will."

"And now I'll go to sleep, or I shan't be down to supper. You'll come and call me if I'm not, won't you?"

"All right," said Tod, tucking the counterpane about him. "Are you comfortable, Archie?"

"Quite. Thank you."

Tod came on to the field again, and joined the game. It was a little less rough, and there were no more mishaps. We got home later than usual, and the supper stood on the table.

The suppers at Worcester House were always the same. Bread and cheese. And not too much of it. Half a round off the loaf, with a piece of cheese, for each fellow; and a small drop of beer or water. Our other meals were good and plentiful; but the Doctor waged war with heavy suppers. If old Hall had had her way, we should have got none. Little Hearn did not appear; and Tod, biting at his bread and cheese, went up to look after him. I followed.

Opening the door without noise, we stood listening and looking. Not

that there was much good in looking, for the room was in darkness then.

"Archie," whispered Tod.

No answer. No sound.

"Are you asleep, old fellow?"

Not a word still. The dead might be there, for all the sound there was.

"He's asleep, for certain," said Tod, groping his way towards the bed. "So much the better, poor little chap. I'll not wake him."

It was a small room, two beds in it. Archie's was the one at the end by the wall. Tod groped his way to it, and bent over him, touching his face, I think. Now that our eyes were accustomed to the darkness, it seemed a bit lighter.

Something like a shout from Tod made me start. It was but a kind of suppressed cry. But in the dark, and holding the breath, one gets startled easily.

"Get a light, Johnny. A light!—quick! for the love of heaven."

I believe I leaped the stairs at a bound. I believe I knocked over Mother Hall at the foot. I know I snatched the candle that was in her hand; and she screamed after me as if I had murdered her.

"Here it is, Tod."

He was at the door waiting for it, every atom of colour gone clean out of his countenance. Carrying it to the bed, he let its light fall full on Archie Hearn. The face was white and cold; the mouth covered with froth.

"Oh Tod! What is it that's the matter with him?"

"Hush, Johnny! I fear he's dying. Good Lord! to think we should have been such ignorant fools as to leave him by himself!—as not to have sent for Featherston!"

We were down again in a moment. Hall stood scolding still at the top of her breath, demanding her candle. Tod said a word that stopped her. She backed against the wall, staring at him.

"Don't you play your tricks on me, Mr. Todhetley."

"Go and see," said Tod.

She took the light from his hand quietly, and went up. Just then, the Doctor and Mrs. Frost, who had been walking all the way home from Sir John Whitney's, where they had spent the evening, came in: and learnt what had happened.

Featherston was there in no time, so to say, and shut himself in the bedroom with the Doctor and Mrs. Frost and Hall, and I don't know how many more. Nothing could be done for Archibald Hearn: he was not quite dead, but close upon it. He was dead before anybody thought of sending to Mrs. Hearn. It came to the same. Had there been telegraph wires to send and bring her upon, she would have come too late.

When I look back upon that evening—and a good many years have gone by since, as if it had been in the beginning of the world—nothing arises in my mind but a picture of confusion, tinged with a feeling of dreadful sorrow; ay, and of horror. If a death happens in a school, it is generally kept from the pupils, so far as may be; at any rate they are not allowed to see any of the attendant stir and details. But this was different. Upon masters and boys, upon mistress and household, it came with the like startling shock. Dr. Frost said feebly that the boys ought to go up to bed, and then Blair told us to go; but the boys stayed on where they were. Hanging about the passages, stealing up stairs and peeping into the room, questioning Featherston (when we could get the chance to come upon him) whether Hearn would get well. Nobody checked us.

I went in once. Mrs. Frost was alone, kneeling by the bed; I thought she must have been saying a prayer. Just then she lifted her head to look at him. As I backed away again, she began to speak aloud—and oh! what a sad tone she said it in!

“The only son of his mother, and she was a widow!”

There had to be an inquest. It did not come to much. The most that could be said was, that he died from a kick at football. “A most unfortunate but accidental kick,” quoth the coroner. Tod had said that he saw the kick given: that is, had seen some foot come flat down with a bang on the side of little Hearn’s head; and when Tod was asked if he recognized the foot, he replied, No: for boots looked much alike, and there were a vast many out in the scrimmage, all kicking together.

Not one would own to having given it. For the matter of that, the fellow might not have been conscious of what he did. No end of thoughts glanced towards Barrington: both because he was so ferocious at the game, and that he had a spite against Hearn.

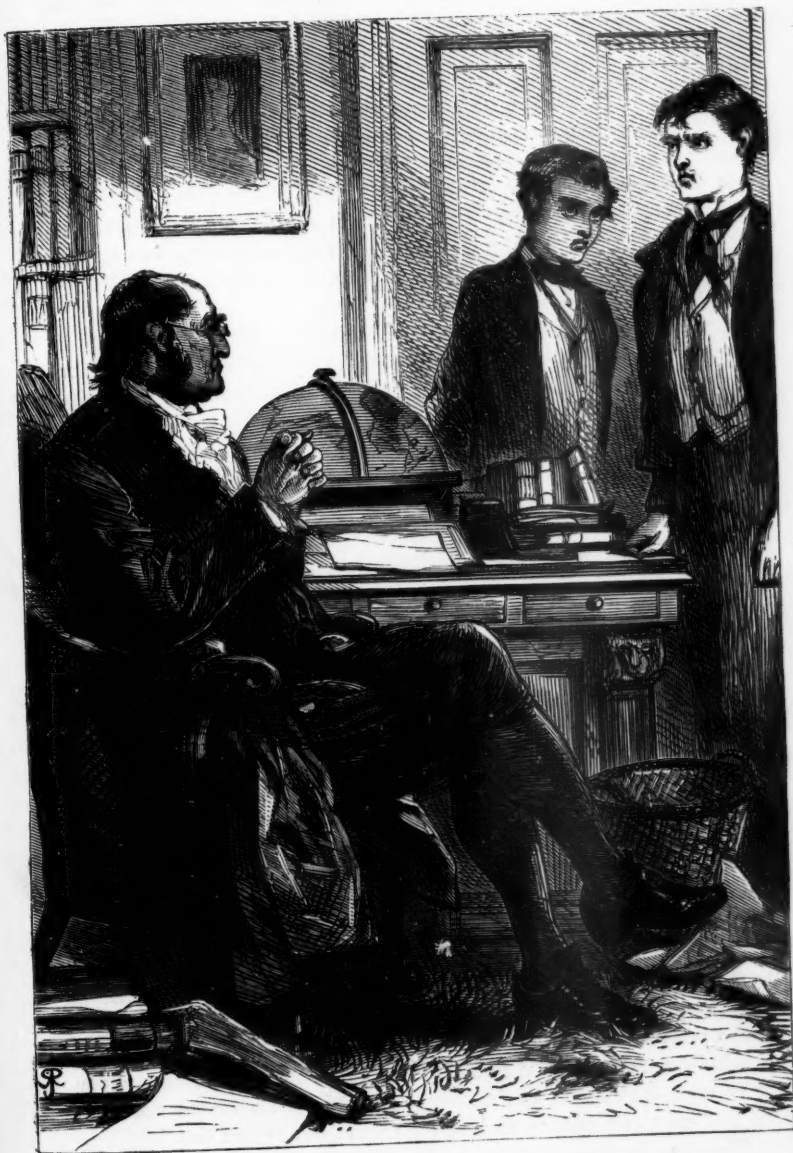
“I never touched him,” said Barrington when this leaked out; and his face and voice were fearlessly defiant. “It wasn’t me. I never so much as saw that Hearn was down.”

And as there were others quite as brutal at football as Barrington, he was believed.

We could not get over it any way. It seemed so dreadful that he should have been left alone to die. Hall was chiefly to blame for that; and it cowed her.

“Look here,” said Tod to us, “I have got a message for one of you. Whichever the cap fits may take it to himself. When Hearn was dying he told me to say that he forgave the fellow who kicked him.”

This was the evening of the inquest-day. We had all gathered in the porch by the stone bench, and Tod took the opportunity to relate what he had not related before. He repeated every word that Hearn had said.



"Barrington denies it to the Doctor's face."

y
k
fi
su

sa
no

T

th

T
w
k
al

st

th
si
w
si
so
th
B
w
vi

h

sa
co
pi
K

th
u

"Did Hearn know who it was, then?" asked John Whitney.

"I think so."

"Then why didn't you ask him to name?"

"Why didn't I ask him to name!" repeated Tod, in a fume. "Do you suppose I thought he was going to die, Whitney?—or that the kick was to turn out a serious one? Hearn was getting big enough to fight his own battles: and I never thought but he'd be up again at supper-time."

John Whitney pushed his hair back, in his quiet, thoughtful way, and said no more. He was to die, himself, the following year—but that has nothing to do with the present matter.

I was standing away at the gate after this, looking at the sunset, when Tod came up and put his arms on the top bar.

"What are you gazing at, Johnny?"

"At the sunset. How red it is! I was thinking that if Hearn's up there now he is better off. It's very beautiful."

"I'd not like to have been the one to send him there, though," was Tod's answer. "Johnny, I am certain Hearn knew who it was," he went on in a low tone. "I am certain he thought the fellow, himself, knew, and that it had been done for the purpose. I think I know also."

"Tell us," I said. And Tod glanced over his shoulders, to make sure nobody was within hearing, before he replied.

"Wolfe Barrington."

"Why don't you accuse him, Tod?"

"It wouldn't do. And I'm not absolutely sure. What I saw, was this. In the rush one of them fell: I saw his head lying on the ground sideways. Before I could shout out to the fellows to take care, a boot with a grey trouser over it came stamping down (not kicking) on the side of the head. If ever anything was done deliberately, that stamp seemed to be; it could hardly have been accidental. I know no more than that: it all passed in a moment of time. I didn't *see* that it was Barrington. But—what other fellow is there among us who would have wilfully harmed little Hearn? It's that thought that brings me conviction."

I looked round to where a lot of them stood at a distance. "Wolfe has got on grey trousers, too."

"That does not tell much," returned Tod. "Half of us wear the same. Yours are grey; mine are grey. It's just this: While I am convinced in my own mind that it was Barrington, there's no sort of proof that it was, and he denies it. So it must rest, and die away. Keep counsel, Johnny."

The funeral took place from the school. All of us went to it. In the evening, Mrs. Hearn, who had been staying at the house, surprised us by coming into the tea-room. She looked very small in her black

gown. Her thin cheeks were more flushed than usual, and her eyes had a mournful sadness in them.

"I wish to say good-bye to you; and to shake hands with you before I go home," she began, in a kind tone. And we all got up from the table to face her.

"I thought you would like me to tell you that I feel sure it was quite an accident; that no harm was intended. My dear little son said this to Joseph Todhetley when he was dying—and, do you know, I fancy that some prevision of death must have lain then upon his spirit and caused him to say it, though he himself might not have been quite conscious of it. He died in love and peace with all; and, if he had anything to forgive—he forgave freely. I wish to let you know that I do the same. Only try to be a little less rough at play—and God bless you all. Will you shake hands with me?"

John Whitney went up to her first, meeting her offered hand.

"If it had been anything but an accident, Mrs. Hearn," he began, in a tone of deep feeling, "if any one of us had done it wilfully, I think, standing to hear you now, we should sink to the earth in our shame and contrition. You cannot regret Archibald much more than we do."

"In the midst of my grief, I know one thing: that God has taken him from a world of care to peace and happiness; I try to *rest* in that. Thank you all. Good-bye."

Catching up her breath, she shook hands with us one by one, giving each a smile; but did not say more.

And the only one of us who did not feel her visit as it was meant, was Barrington. But he had no feeling: his body was too strong for it, his temper too fierce. He would have thrown a sneer of ridicule after her, but Whitney hissed it down.

Before another day had gone over, Barrington and Tod had a row. It was about a crib. Tod could be as overbearing as Barrington when he pleased, and he was cherishing a bad feeling towards him. They had it out in private—but it did not come to a fight. Tod was not one to keep in matters till they rankled, and he openly told Barrington that he believed it was he who had caused Hearn's death. Barrington denied it out-and-out; first of all swearing passionately that he had not, and then calming down to talk about it quietly. Tod felt less sure of it after that: as he confided to me in the bedroom.

Dr. Frost forbid football. And the time went on.

II.

What I have to relate further may be thought a made-up story, such as we read in fiction. It is so very like a case of retribution. But it is all true, and happened as I shall put it. And somehow I never care to dwell long upon the calamity.

It was as nearly as possible a year after Hearn died. Jessup was captain of the school, for John Whitney was too ill to come. Jessup was nearly as rebellious as Wolfe; and the two would ridicule Blair audaciously, and call him "Baked pie" to his face. One morning, when they had given no end of trouble to old Frost over their Greek, and laid the blame upon the hot weather, the Doctor said he had a great mind to keep them in till dinner-time. However, they eat humble-pie, and were allowed to escape. Blair was taking us for a walk. Instead of keeping with the ranks, Barrington and Jessup fell out, and sat down on the gate of a field where the wheat was being carried. Blair said they might sit there if they pleased, but forbid them to cross the gate. Indeed, there was a general and standing interdiction against our entering any field while the crops were being gathered. We went on, and left them.

Half an hour afterwards, before we got back, Barrington had been carried home, dying.

Dying, as was supposed. They had disobeyed Blair, disregarded orders, and rushed into the field, shouting and leaping like two mad fellows—as the labourers said afterwards. Making for the waggon, laden high with wheat, they mounted it, and started on the horses. In some way, Barrington lost his balance, slipped over the side, and the hind wheel went over him.

I shall never forget the house when we got home. Jessup, in his terror, had made off for his home, running all the way—seven miles. He was in the same boat as Wolfe, except that he escaped injury—had gone over in defiance of orders, and got on the waggon. Barrington was lying in the blue-room; and Mrs. Frost, frightened out of bed, stood on the landing in her night-cap, a shawl wrapped round her loose white dressing-gown. She was ill at the time. Featherston came striding up the road, wiping his hot face.

"Lord bless me!" cried Featherston, when he had looked at Wolfe and touched him. "I can't deal with this by myself, Dr. Frost."

The Doctor had guessed that. And Roger was already away on a galloping horse, flying to fetch another. It was little Pink he brought: a shrimp of a man, with a fair reputation in his profession. But the two were more accustomed to treat rustic ailments than grave cases, and Dr. Frost knew that. Evening drew on, and the dusk was gathering, when a carriage with post horses came thundering in at the front gates, bringing Mr. Carden.

They did not explain to us boys the particulars of the injuries; and I don't know them to this day. The spine was hurt; the right ankle smashed: we heard that much. Taptal, Barrington's guardian, came over, and an uncle from London. Altogether, it was a miserable time. The masters seized upon it to be extra stern, and read us lectures upon disobedience and rebellion—as if we had been the offenders! As to

Jessup, his father handed him back again to Dr. Frost, saying that in his opinion a taste of birch would much conduce to his benefit.

Barrington did not seem to suffer as keenly as some might; perhaps his spirits kept him up, for they were untamed. On the very day after the accident, he asked for some of the fellows to go in and sit with him, because he was dull. By and by, the doctors said. And the next day but one, Dr. Frost sent in me. Me! The paid nurse sat at the end of the room.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Ludlow! Where's Jessup?"

"Jessup's under punishment."

His face looked the same as ever, and that was all of him that could be seen. He lay on his back, covered over. As to the low bed, it might have been a board, to judge by the flatness. And perhaps was.

"I'm very sorry about it, Barrington. We all are. Are you in much pain?"

"Oh I don't know," was his impatient answer. "One has to grin and bear it. The cursed idiots had stacked the wheat sloping to the sides, or it would never have happened. What do you hear about me?"

"Nothing but regret that it—"

"I don't mean that stuff. Regret, indeed! regret won't undo it. I mean as to my getting about again. Will it be ages first?"

"We don't hear a word."

"If they were to keep me here a month, Ludlow, I should go mad. Rampant.—You shut up, old woman."

For the nurse had interfered, telling him he must not excite himself.

"My ankle's hurt; but I believe it is not half as bad as a regular fracture: and my back's bruised. Well, what's a bruise? Nothing. Of course there's pain and stiffness, and all that; but so there is after a bad fight, or a thrashing. And they talk about my lying here for three or four weeks! Catch me."

One thing was evident: that they had not allowed Wolfe to suspect the gravity of the case. Down stairs we had an inkling, I don't remember whence gathered, that it might possibly end in death. There was a suspicion of some injury that we could not get to know of; inward, I think; and it was said that even Mr. Carden, with all his skill, could not get to it either. Any way, the prospect of recovery for Barrington was supposed to be of the scantiest; and it put a gloom upon us.

A sad mishap was to occur. Of course nobody in their senses would have let Barrington learn the danger he was in; especially while there was just a chance that the peril would be surmounted. I read a book lately—I, Johnny Ludlow—where a little child met with an accident; and the first thing the people around him did, father, doctors, nurses, was to inform him that he would be a cripple for the rest of his days. That was common sense with a vengeance, that was; and about as likely to occur in real life as that I could turn myself into a Dutch-

man. However, something of the kind did happen in Barrington's case, but through inadvertence. Another uncle came over from Ireland, an old man, and in talking with Featherston spoke out too freely. They were outside Barrington's door, and supposed he was asleep besides. But he had woken up then; and heard more than he ought. That blue-room always seemed to have an echo in it.

"So it's all up with me, Ludlow!"

I was by his bedside when he suddenly said this, in the gathering dusk of the summer's evening. He had been lying quite silent since I entered, and his face had a white, still look on it, never before noticed there.

"What do you mean, Barrington?"

"None of your shamming here. I know, and so do you, Johnny Ludlow. I say, though, it makes one feel queer to find the world's slipping away. I had looked for so much jolly *life* in it."

"Barrington, you may get well yet, you may, indeed. Ask Pink and Featherston, else, when they next come; ask Mr. Carden. I can't think what idea you have been getting hold of."

"There, that's enough," he answered. "Don't bother. I want to be quiet."

He shut his eyes; and the dusk grew greater as the minutes passed. Presently some one came into the room with a gentle step: a lady in a black-and-white gown that didn't rustle. It was Mrs. Hearn. Barrington looked up at her.

"I am going to stay with you for a day or two," she said in a low sweet voice, bending over him and touching his forehead with her cool fingers. "I hear you have taken a dislike to the nurse: and Mrs. Frost is really too weakly just now to get about."

"She's a sly cat," said Barrington, alluding to the nurse: "she watches me out of the tail of her eye. Hall's as bad. They are in league together."

"Well, they shall not come in more than I can help. I'll nurse you myself."

"No; not you," said Barrington, his face looking red and uneasy. "I'll not trouble *you*."

She sat down in my chair, just pressing my hand in token of greeting. And I left them.

In the ensuing days his life trembled in the balance: and even when part of the more immediate danger was surmounted, part of the worst of the pain, it was still a toss-up. Barrington had no hope whatever: I don't think Mrs. Hearn had, either.

She hardly left him. At first, he seemed to resent her presence; to wish her away; to receive what she did for him unwillingly: but, in spite of himself he grew to look round for her, and to let his hand lie in hers whenever she chose to take it.

Who can tell what she said to him? Who can know how she softly and gradually awoke the good feelings within him, and won his heart from its brazen hardness? She did do it, and that's enough. The way was paved for her. What the accident had not done, the fear of death had. Tamed him.

One evening when the sun had sunk, leaving only its light fading in the western sky, and Barrington had been watching it from his bed, he suddenly burst into tears. Mrs. Hearn, busy amidst the physic bottles, was by his side in a moment.

"Wolfe!"

"It's very hard to have to die."

"Hush, my dear, you are not worse: a little better. I think you may be spared; I do indeed. And—in any case—you know what I read to you this evening: that to die is gain."

"Yes, for some. I've never had my thoughts turned that way."

"They are turned now. That's quite enough."

"It is such a little while to have lived," went on Barrington, after a pause. "Such a little while to have enjoyed earth. What are my few years compared to the ages that have gone by, to the ages and ages that are to come? Nothing. Not as much as a single drop of water to the wide ocean."

"Wolfe, dear, if you live out the allotted years of man, three score and ten, what would even that be in comparison? As you say—nothing. It seems to me that our well-being or ill-being here need not much concern us: the days, whether short or long, will pass as a dream. Eternal life lasts for ever: soon we must all be departing for it."

Wolfe made no answer. The clear sky was assuming its pale tints, blue, green, orange, shading off one into another, a beautiful opal, and his eyes were looking out at it. But as if he saw nothing.

"Listen, my dear. When Archibald died, I thought I should have died; died of grief and aching pain. I grieved to think how short had been his span of life on this fair earth; how cruel his fate in being taken from it so early. But, oh Wolfe, God has shown me my mistake. I would not have him back if I could."

Wolfe put up his hand to cover his face. Not a word spoke he.

"I wish you could see things as I see them now that they have been cleared for me," she resumed. "It is so much better to be in heaven than on earth. We, who are here, have to battle with many cares and crosses; and shall have to the end. Archie has thrown all care off. He is in happiness amidst the redeemed."

The room was getting darker; the sky's opal tints came out brighter. Wolfe's face was one of intense pain.

"Wolfe dear, don't mistake me; don't think me hard if I say that you would be happier there than here. There is nothing to dread, dying in Christ. Believe me, I would not for the world have Archie back again:

how could I make sure then what the eventual ending would be? You and he will know each other up there."

"Don't," said Wolfe.

"Don't what?"

Wolfe pulled her hand close to his face and she knelt down to catch his whisper.

"I killed him."

A pause: and a kind of sob in her throat. Then, drawing away her hand, she laid her cheek to his.

"My dear, I think I have known it."

"You—have—known—it?" stammered disbelieving Wolfe.

"Yes. I thought it was likely. I felt nearly sure. Don't let it trouble you now. Archie forgave, you know, and I forgave: and God will forgive."

"How could you come here to nurse me—knowing that?"

"It made me the more anxious to come. You have no mother."

"No." Wolfe was sobbing bitterly. "She died when I was born. I've never had anybody. I've never had a chapter read to me, or a prayer prayed."

"No no, dear. And Archie—oh, Archie had all that. From the time he could speak, I tried to train him for heaven. It has seemed to me, since, just as though I had foreseen he would go early, and was preparing him for it."

"I never meant to kill him," sobbed Wolfe. "I saw his head down there, and I sent my foot upon it without a moment's thought. If I had taken thought, or known it would hurt him seriously, I'd not have done it."

"He is better off, dear," was all she said. "You have that comfort."

"Any way, I am paid out for it. At the best, I suppose I shall go upon crutches for life. That's bad enough: but dying's worse. Mrs. Hearn, I am not ready."

"Be you very sure God will not take you until you are ready, if you only wish and hope to be made so from your very heart," she whispered. "I am praying to Him often for you, Wolfe."

"I think you must be one of heaven's angels," said Wolfe, with a burst of emotion.

"No, dear; only a weak woman. I have had so much sorrow and care, trial upon trial, one disappointment after another, that it has left me nothing but heaven to lean upon. Wolfe, I am trying to show you a little bit of the way there: and I think—I do indeed—that this accident, which seems, and is, so dreadful, may have been sent by God in mercy. Perhaps, else, you might never have found Him: and where would you have been in all that long, long eternity that has to come? A few years here: millions of never ending ages hereafter—oh Wolfe!

Bear up bravely for the little span, even though the cross be heavy. Fight on manfully for the real life."

"If you'll help me."

"To be sure I will."

III.

Wolfe got about again, and came out upon crutches. After awhile they were discarded, first one, then the other, and he took to a stick permanently. He would never go without that. He would never run or leap again, or kick much either. The doctors looked upon it as a wonderful cure—and old Featherston was apt to talk to us boys as if it were he who had pulled him through it. But not in Henry Carden's hearing.

The uncles and Taptal said he'd be better now at a private tutor's. But Wolfe would not leave Dr. Frost's. A low pony carriage was bought for him, and all his spare time he'd go driving over to Mrs. Hearn's. He was as a son to her. His great animal spirits had been taken out of him, you see; and he had to find his happiness in quieter grooves. One Saturday afternoon he drove me over. Mrs. Hearn had asked me to stay with her until the Monday morning. Barrington generally stayed.

It was in November. Considerably more than a year after the accident. The guns of the sportsmen were heard in the wood; a pack of hounds and their huntsmen rode past the cottage at a gallop, in full chase after a late find. Barrington looked and listened, a sigh escaping him.

"These pleasures are barred to me now."

"But a better one has been opened to you," said Mrs. Hearn, with a meaningful smile, as she took his hand to hold.

And on Wolfe's face, when he glanced at her in answer, there sat a look of satisfied rest, that I am sure had never been seen on it before he fell off the waggon.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.



AT WHITBY.

FOUR ERAS.

I.

"I HAVE left the sinful world and chosen Heav'n :
Lord, keep me thine !"
Such prayers rise to the vaulted roof which shrouds
St. Hilda's shrine.
And down each lofty aisle and cloistered path
Glide silent forms,
Safe, in the sacred Abbey's shelt'ring shade,
From Life's rough storms :
Sweet hymns of praise are lifted all day long ;
And, in dark night,
The simple nuns dream, in their narrow cells,
Of Love's delight.

II.

The autumn brings the whalers home from far ;
And, on the quay,
All press to hear the news of those on board,
Or lost at sea ;
And eager eyes are strained—while hearts beat high,
'Twixt hope and fear—
To catch a glimpse, across the harbour-bar,
Of one held dear :
And the rich, hard-earned freight is half forgot,
In the first joy
Of clasping in successful, stalwart arms
Loved wife or boy.

III.

High on the tow'ring scar, a woman stands,
Above the roar
Of the wild ocean's fury, and the wrecks
Which strew the shore ;
Watching th' intrepid life-boat rise and fall
With each huge wave,
While the bold crew live only as one man
More lives to save :
For twice already this drear afternoon,
Below the pier,
They have brought a human cargo safe to land,
'Midst shout and cheer ;
And none will cease from his proud task, nor yield
His gallant oar ;
So the undaunted band, with failing strength,
Starts out once more :
But noble purpose nerves each arm, and fires
Each steadfast eye ;
And all goes well till—Hark ! from the high rock
A piercing cry !—
The woman watches still—as, with fierce rush
And awful leap,
A mighty billow bursts upon the boat ;
And in the deep—
The raging deep, her two brave sons are cast,
Among their fellow heroes, for their last,
Unending sleep.

IV.

The sun is blazing on the wide-stretched moors
 With cloudless pow'r,
 Bright'ning to lustrous amethyst the heath
 In open flow'r ;
 And sparkling on the burnished summer sea,
 Where, in full light,
 The sails of many a passing sloop and brig
 Gleam dazzling white.
 Gaily dressed idlers lounge upon the cliff
 To hear the band,
 Or over "Silvia's Lovers" hang entranced :
 And in the sand,
 Their loose locks lifted and their fair cheeks kissed
 By each soft breeze;
 The happy children dig, and build, and romp,
 In careless ease.

 On the steep side of either cliff, which skirts
 The river-bed,
 Nestles the quaint old town, whose steep, tiled roofs
 Show ruddy red
 In the warm glow ; and, crowning the grand height
 On the east side,
 The ruined monast'ry and old church stand
 In stately pride,
 Frowning upon the pretty play at sci'nce
 Kept up beneath,
 Where laughing ladies scour for ammonites
 The shores of death.

 Scattered abroad upon the shimm'ring sea
 Both far and wide,
 The herring-fleet awaits, with ready sail,
 The rising tide.
 See now ! at length the heavy-laden boats
 Come one by one
 Up to the staithes, to land their welcome store,
 Till all is done -
 Till ev'ry shining, silver heap is told
 By the skilled hand,
 Which counts by twos and twos, where, piled up high,
 The baskets stand,
 Waiting to take in turn a full supply ;
 And all along
 The busy quay resounds the sportive jest,
 Or snatch of song,
 As carts are filled and nets hung out to dry ;
 For ev'ry heart
 Rejoices in its neighbour's joy ; and each
 With all takes part.
 And surely He who made poor fishermen
 His friends on earth,
 Stoops down from Heav'n to guard and bless them still
 In toil or mirth.

EMMA RHODES.

MISS TAMARIND'S CHRISTMAS DAY.

(FOUNDED ON FACT.)

IT was a beautiful little white house, with lilies and roses outside it, and a green lawn sloping to the small iron gate. That is, lilies and roses in the proper season for them; now, December weather, they were replaced by laurels and other evergreens. Miss Tamarind owned the house, and lived in it with her one servant; she had not a farthing less of income than a hundred and fifty pounds a year; and of course was somebody to be looked up to amidst her neighbours.

Miss Tamarind was a sociable, pleasant lady, who liked to appear to the best advantage. Her private wonder was, that nobody had ever asked her to be married. It perhaps may be said that she held some inward anxiety upon the point; which was mingled, however, with a little hope—but she'd not have spoken of it for the world. At a recent convivial dinner, given by her friends, Mr. and Mrs. Lethridge; who were, comparatively, fresh comers to the place; she had owned to thirty-one years. And that is a serious age, you know, for a single lady. It must be confessed that Miss Tamarind had rather an older air. Ill-natured Mrs. Jones, who was also dining there, whispered to the gentleman at her elbow that Jemima Tamarind looked forty if she looked a day. Miss Tamarind dressed in a young style. Her brown hair, glossy and abundant, was worn in a shower of ringlets; her blue eyes were bright. It was only the features, thin and lined, that had a look of age.

Brisk as a bee was Miss Tamarind on this Christmas Eve. It was an important epoch with her; for on the morrow she would put off the mourning that she had worn very nearly two years for her mother—from whom the house and property had descended to her. It had cost Miss Tamarind much debating thought as to what her new costume should be. The matter had been decided with care; all was now complete; and the various articles were laid out on the spare bed in readiness for the morrow's festival.

Miss Tamarind had been giving an eye to the domestic preparations—for she was not above it—had made the mince-pies, and seen the pudding put on to boil. Her Christmas dinner would be rather solitary, as she knew. Two years ago her mother was yet living; last year she had dined out with some old friends: but this year she was invited nowhere. She supposed she must sit down in solitary state: it would not do, she was afraid, to invite one whom she would have liked to invite. People were so given to talk: and in fact, she would not her-

self have appeared forward or unmaidenly for the world. Perhaps no harm might be thought if she asked him to come in for a cup of tea.

The day's work was nearly over; it was growing dusk; and Miss Tamarind was dressing her parlours with holly and ivy, assisted by her maid, Bridget—a clean, steady, good sort of servant, though she did come from the Sister Isle.

"Is there any to go behind this here picture, Miss Jemima?" demanded Bridget, looking at a framed portrait, opposite the fireplace.

Miss Jemima hesitated in doubt. It was her mother's portrait: ought the likeness of the regretted dead to be framed round with gala leaves? But yes. That mother, she hoped, was in great happiness, singing the songs of the redeemed that Christ the Saviour came down to rescue.

"I'll do it myself, Bridget. It shall have a beautiful little border all round the frame."

"There warn't none round him last year," remarked Bridget.

No. The loss seemed to have been so recent then.

"And where'll I put the mistletoe? A fine bunch it be, Miss Jemima."

Miss Jemima's blushes came red and hot at the question. Fortunately the evening had grown darker.

"I—don't think—I can have any mistletoe in here, Bridget," said the sensitive lady. "Keep it for your kitchen."

"Law missus, just a little spray on't for luck. There: I'll put him to hang out from the top o' the glass over the chimbley. Nobody won't see him there."

Miss Tamarind yielded carelessly: it was the dining-room, not the drawing-room, few visitors came into it, and her handmaiden might be right—that it would never get seen. It was many a year now since Miss Tamarind had received a kiss under the mistletoe; since any swain had attempted to offer one. She heaved a silent sigh as the thought came home to her.

"That's about all now, Miss Jemima. The room looks rare and jovial."

Bridget meant jovial. Miss Tamarind assented; and swept the odd leaves into the girl's apron.

"I should like my tea at once, Bridget. It must be nearly five o'clock."

Bridget brought it in presently, with the candles and a toasted muffin. Miss Tamarind then put on her cloak and bonnet; for she had promised to go and help in the decorating of the church.

A little old-fashioned church that might have been built by its architect as a curiosity, this of St. John's. Miss Tamarind found a host of ladies at work, nearly buried in evergreens. The old rector had looked

in to see : his curate, the Reverend Sandy Macfuseras, was doing his best to help the ladies.

A tall, meek, mild-eyed gentleman, this curate—who had gone bald at the top of his head, and had a fringe of gray hair round it. He was immensely popular in the district, chiefly because he was unmarried. So many single ladies, old and young—not to speak of the widows—had never attended St. John's Church as since he came to it, a year ago. The previous curate had a wife and seven children : and the ladies had then mostly gone to another church, saying this was draughty. Mr. Macfuseras was turned forty-four, and readily owned it. There was no chance of his marrying : his stipend was too small ; and he readily owned that. But perhaps he was not believed. He shook hands with Miss Tamarind : who threw her cloak off, and began to join in the wreathing with a will. It was this gentleman that Miss Tamarind would have liked to ask to share her dinner on the morrow, but dared not.

Suppressed tittering arose on the other side the mound of green. A piece of mistletoe, as big as a spray of parsley, had disclosed its sacrilegious presence amidst the holly.

"Oh, Mr. Macfuseras—such a mistake!" cried the gushing voice of Miss Juno—a young lady with a magnificent top-knot of hair. "Do look ! We can't put it in, can we?"

The mistletoe was pushed forward, and Mr. Macfuseras coughed behind his hand, in some confusion. He was guileless as a child ; and supposed the ladies ran about after him for the good of the parish.

"What is it?" asked Miss Tamarind, peering forward, but quite unable to see. She was naturally very near-sighted ; and seemed to see less well year by year—but she didn't say so.

"What is it!—why mistletoe : so vulgar, you know!" giggled the young lady. And Miss Jemima Tamarind, between the remembrance of what Bridget had done at home, and the presence of Mr. Macfuseras beside her, felt her face turn as scarlet as the holly berries.

"You can drop it on the floor, to be cleared away with the rubbish," mildly suggested the reverend gentleman, as he worked away with his pen-knife, cutting off sprays.

By ten o'clock the work was completed, the decorations were up in the curious old church. One small gallery came perching out from the wall over the entrance and facing the chancel. This being the most conspicuous part in the edifice—outshining in that respect even the pulpit—it received a large share of the ornamentation.

The crowd of ladies turned towards the town ; they all happened to live that way. Miss Tamarind had to go in the direction of the outskirts. As she was alone, Mr. Macfuseras offered to attend her—he could not well do less. The rest watched them off : she on the pavement, he beyond the gutter in the native retirement of his manners.

"Horrid sly cat, that old Tamarind is!" observed Miss Juno. "I'm sure we could have done quite well without her help."

It was a beautiful night, the stars glittering like diamonds in the frosty sky. Arrived at Miss Tamarind's gate, the clergyman shook hands, and she thanked him for his politeness in walking with her. They were in the habit of meeting sometimes at the Lethridges, to whom he was distantly related, and therefore were on friendly terms.

"You dine out to-morrow, of course?" said Miss Tamarind. "But—I was thinking—if you would honour my poor little tea-table afterwards, with your presence, Mr. Macfuseras—that is, should you not be better engaged?" she stopped in confusion.

"Thank you, I'll come with pleasure if I can get away."

Miss Tamarind eat her supper, and sat before the fire musing, when Bridget had taken the tray away. Her home seemed very lonely! all by herself at this festal time, when other families met to make merry! She could not help picturing how happy it might be if somebody came to join her—say St. John's curate, for instance. The poor lady had grown to like him rather more than was good for her peace. There was not a man in the wide world she esteemed and revered so much as he. She became lost in an imaginary vista of the future, so improbable, and yet so charming, that when Bridget brought in the bed-candle, she started up as if the house had been on fire.

Miss Tamarind had an enchanting dream that night. She thought she was in a bower, or arbour, made of natural flowers of many colours, all bright and beautiful to look upon. As she sat there dressed as a princess, a soft white light arose, softer yet brighter than any yet seen on earth; many people were bowing before her in homage, and amidst them, more distinct than any, she saw Mr. Macfuseras. Never had she experienced so delightful a sensation; her whole heart seemed to desire nothing further: it was the acme of bliss.

"My goodness, what a sweet dream!" thought Miss Tamarind when she awoke. "What a pity it is that dreams never come true!"

On the breakfast-table lay a parcel and a letter, that the post had brought from London. The parcel contained a beautiful prayer-book of dark blue morocco with double-clasps of silver; the letter a hope that she would accept the book and all good wishes with it.

"How kind it is of them to remember me!" thought Miss Tamarind, the grateful tears gathering in her eyes. "I am glad they have chosen a big one with large print! My old book was getting very shabby."

Who so proud, that Christmas Day, as Miss Tamarind, when she turned out of her house in all the glory of her new attire! An emerald-green satin gown that glistened in the sun, a jacket garnished with white fur; and a resplendent white bonnet that had a top-knot of carnations, and drooping tassels of gold. Bridget caught up her breath

when she came forward to open the street-door, and backed against the wall instead of doing it.

"My stars and smithereens, Miss Jemima! Faix, and the sun to-day never'll be half as lovely as you."

"Now Bridget, you are sure you can manage the stuffing for the turkey?" questioned Miss Jemima, making believe not to care for the adulation, though it was in truth as the veriest incense to her heart. "You *can* do it well, you know, if you will."

"Trust me, missis—and ain't it for the gala dinner o' this blessed day!" was the girl's answer. "Oh, but that gownd's just a rainbow, ma'am!"

What with guarding the gown from contact with the streets, and what with the new prayer-book and a white muff, Miss Tamarind had her hands full as she sailed down the road. Opposite Mr. Lethridge's house, she saw Master Richard, a gentleman of ten, mounted on the spikes of the iron gates.

"Why Dick, you should not be doing that on Christmas Day," reproved Miss Tamarind. "Are your papa and mamma gone to church yet?"

"Pa and ma's not going," responded Dick, jumping down. "Pa's ill."

Miss Tamarind was early, and thought she would go in and see what was the matter. Dick marshalled her into the drawing-room, while he called his mother. She sat down by the round table, putting her prayer-book upon it.

It was only a bilious attack, Mrs. Lethridge said; she hoped her husband would be up for dinner. One of the little ones was also not well, and she meant to remain at home herself.

"See what a beautiful present I have had," said Miss Tamarind, showing the prayer-book. "Dick, my dear, I wish you'd not jump on and off the back of my chair."

"Dick's worse than ever," cried Mrs. Lethridge, after she had returned the book to the table. "He's the most troublesome boy ever born. I dare not let him go to church without me."

Miss Tamarind, in her good nature, had a great mind to offer to take Dick herself. But she dared not. He would be pitching the hymn-books on the people's heads below—or something else as dreadful.

"Where do you dine to-day, Jemima?" asked Mrs. Lethridge.

"At home."

"At home!—alone! Dear me, you had better come to us. We shall be by ourselves, except for the curate—*he's* coming. Come in as soon as you like in the afternoon, my dear, and stay to dinner."

Miss Tamarind's heart and cheeks alike glowed, as she accepted the invitation. So she should eat her Christmas fare with the Reverend Sandy, after all. She rose to go.

"What a lovely colour that dress is—and how well the skirt hangs!" cried Mrs. Lethridge. "Turn round, Jemima."

Nothing loth, Miss Tamarind submitted to be turned about and admired. Then, catching up her prayer-book, and pushing it into her muff, she ran home to tell Bridget not to cook the turkey. Altogether, what with one delay and another, the bells had ceased ringing when Miss Tamarind reached St. John's Church.

At any other time she would have been vexed: she did not much mind it now. Her head was full of the impression she was going to make. Miss Tamarind shared the front seat of the odd little gallery with the Lethridge family, and she had it all to herself that day. Perched aloft in that projecting and most conspicuous pew, it would almost seem at times to Miss Tamarind that she was nearly nose to knees with the parson in front of her—whether it might happen to be the rector or the curate. The pulpit, reading-desk, and clerk's seat, were all in one, a kind of upright light-house, the preacher's place at the top, the reader's in the middle, the clerk's at foot. It stood right in the centre before the little chancel.

The Reverend Sandy Macfuseras had begun the prayers when she glided into her pew, her green gown rustling, the gold tassels in her head-gear fluttering. She caught a glimpse of his clean starched surplice and his bald head with its fringe of grey hair, as she knelt down. The congregation were just kneeling down then, and so she remained on her knees, keeping quite quiet. She wished she had not been late: the green gown and the rest of the attire made her very conscious; the sun was shining in with a dazzling light. In spite of herself and her wish to be reverent, her thoughts went roaming away—as do those of the very best of us. The dream came into her mind—came with a rush of perplexity. Why! did not this—*this*—almost seem like its realization? What, but a bower, could this little front pew be compared to, with the graceful wreaths of evergreens looped round its front, and the holly and ivy entwined about its corner pillars? Was not she—she and her finery—receiving the homage of the congregation beneath? Certainly several of them were gazing aloft. Glancing up for a brief moment, Miss Tamarind's eye caught that of the Reverend Mr. Macfuseras.

It was time to stand up again. Miss Tamarind rose with the rest. Indubitably, the whole church looked up now, for aught so startlingly fine had not been seen in the gallery for many a Sunday. As the curate began "Glory be to the Father," Miss Tamarind slowly took her prayer-book out of her muff.

At her full height stood she, in all the pride of her conspicuous position. She felt that she must be looking very beautiful—as a bright picture amidst the setting of holly branches. It might have been called the one culminating point of Miss Tamarind's public life: no Lord Mayor, riding up Cheapside to Westminster, his mace and sword-bearer stuck on either side him to the admiration of the populace, was ever more

puffed-out with vain-glory than she. Generally speaking, Miss Tamarind did her best to confine her mind to divine service, and take profit from it. To-day was altogether an exception. Even the little charity boys, over whom the schoolmaster kept stern ward with a long, white wand had all their heads turned on her. The Reverend Sandy Macfuseras took another glance out of his meek eyes towards the gallery. No wonder Miss Tamarind's fingers, encased in delicate grey gloves, bungled somewhat over the clasp of the prayer-book. It would not come undone. A desperate pull gave she, just as the congregation began their response "As it was in the beginning." Miss Tamarind—

What on earth was it? The prayer-book had suddenly burst into a crash of music, and Miss Tamarind dropped it on the crimson cushion before her; the congregation stopped short in their response; the Reverend Mr. Macfuseras opened his mouth in consternation. "The Blue-Bells of Scotland" was the air, regaling scandalized ears in the sacred edifice.

It was too true. There lay the prayer-book—or what Miss Tamarind had taken for her prayer-book—grinding away louder than any street-organ. The unhappy lady, standing like a statue struck into stone, bent her near-sighted eyes on the thing she did not dare to touch with her fingers. By slow degrees the solution of the mystery dawned upon her. This was not a prayer-book at all, but a musical-box: and she had set it going by pulling what she had thought was the clasp. She must have taken it up by mistake from Mrs. Lethridge's table.

"Ching, ching, ching; ding, ding, ding," went the thing, very loud and clear, every note distinct; the congregation might have followed on, in their minds, with the words. One excited lad did—rather too loud—as the second verse was plunged into. "In what clothes, in what clothes is your Highland laddie clad?" And down came the white wand on his head in a succession of raps.

Poor Miss Tamarind was in a cold perspiration. Her face had turned deadly white. Could she have sunk beneath the floor for ever through some friendly trap-door, after the manner of the London pantomimes, it had been a blessed boon. She'd have given the whole of her next year's income, for an air-balloon to come and bear her aloft by the roof.

No such luck. She stood in her agony, and the sacrilegious music went on. The service was at a standstill; the congregation had their faces turned upwards. Suddenly, a happy idea seized Miss Tamarind: that, as she had set it going by pulling at the silver knob, or small button, so she might stop it by pushing it back again.

But which knob was it? At a desperate hazard, she pushed one of them. The tune died away. But only for a moment. With a loud click, it broke out again, ten times more dreadful than before.

For "The Blue-Bells of Scotland" is a decent air, make the worst of it. This was a fast, zig-zag, disreputable jig, that Miss Tamarind had

danced to scores of times in her young days : one known by a most disreputable name, "The Devil among the Tailors." In the modesty of her blooming youth, Miss Jemima had used to abbreviate the obnoxious name to The "D." among the Tailors.

The D. was racing along at railroad speed. Mr. Macfuseras groaned audibly ; the boys grinned ; the congregation frowned ; the old rector at the communion table made a movement with his hand, as much as to order the wicked interruption to stop. But who could stop those miserable sounds, once they were set going ? Miss Tamarind verily believed the D. had left the tailors and got into the box.

Poor Miss Tamarind ! Cold water ran down her back ; her cheeks and lips grew whiter. A question passed through her mind—which was the worst : to turn tail and make her escape by the stairs ; or to stand it out ? But she could never go, and leave the box behind : and to carry the music with her was quite beyond her philosophy. The white stick kept falling upon the boys' heads without any cessation ; the sunshine glittered ; the up-turned faces began to look like a sea of flame. A gentleman, learned in musical-boxes, came out of his pew near the pulpit and stalked down the aisle, halting in front of the balcony and Miss Tamarind.

"Press the middle button, ma'am. May-be that'll do it."

The audible whisper came distinctly up to her. She did as she was bid : pressing the "button" with the full force of her trembling fingers. But no. The tune only changed. The D. subsided into "Drops of Brandy."

On, it sped. There seemed nothing for it but to let the horrible instrument play itself out. Most unquestionably if the D. had not got into it, something else had. Miss Tamarind prayed to lose consciousness in a fainting fit. But she did not.

The feet of all the boys were shuffling—in spite of the hard blows of the admonishing white stick. They thought they were at a dance. Miss Juno turned up her little nose with a condemning sneer. The Reverend Sandy Macfuseras hid his face in his surplice. The light-minded amid the congregation, almost began to nod their heads to the air. Had it only been a suitable air, the clergy might not have felt it so cruelly ; such, for instance, as the Old Hundredth Psalm. But—Drops of Brandy ! No : there was nothing for it but to let it have its fling.

Miss Tamarind was wiping her cold damp face for the fiftieth time, when the box died away into silence. The service proceeded then : not perhaps with quite the solemnity that it ought to have done, owing to the best part of the congregation turning their eyes upwards perpetually, in the expectation that the box might break out again. How Miss Tamarind sat it out, she does not know unto this day.

She had intended to remain for the second service. How could she now ? How attain to the necessary calm of mind for it ? She humbly

took her departure after the sermon ; the dreadful box hidden under her jacket. Home, she crept, the back way, humiliated to despair. Her green gown had lost its lustre ; she could have flung the bonnet into the first pool. In truth, the blow had been very bitter ; the future comfort of her life seemed not to be worth a day's purchase.

"Go down to Mrs. Lethridge's, Bridget," she said. "Tell her I shall not be able to dine with them to-day, for I've got a headache come on. Give her this box ; and ask for my prayer-book."

"Is it the turkey then that I'll be cooking, after all ?" questioned Bridget.

"Oh cook anything: do what you like," replied her unhappy mistress.

Was it a judgment upon her, she kept asking herself, as she sat over her lonely fire in the growing dusk of the afternoon, the grass green silk put off, and her old black one on. How dared she go to church on Christmas morning, rapt in the thoughts of her finery, and in nothing else? Never again as long as she lived could she be guilty of it ; for the check would serve her for life.

It had been lonely for her lately : and her tears dropped hot and thick, as the fact suggested itself that the future would be far more so. After this awful exhibition that she had caused in the church, neither of its ministers would notice her again : the Reverend Sandy Macfuseras would not be likely to so much as take off his hat to her from the opposite side of the street. And she knew she could have made him so happy ! If that faintly-cherished hope of hers had ever come to anything, she would have worn out her life for his comfort. Well—it was over. She must put up with her trial : and she hoped God would forgive her in time, and bless her with a grain of peace.

She could not eat any dinner. The turkey was cooked to a turn, but every mouthful seemed to choke her. Bridget resentfully demanded whether the stuffing was not right, or what else was the matter with it.

"My head aches so badly," was her excusing answer—and she dared not lift her eyes lest their redness should be seen. "You shall take a nice bit of it to that poor bed-ridden woman close by, Bridget ; and a mince-pie."

So the dinner, wanting an eater, was soon cleared away, and Miss Tamarind sat at the fire again. That her beautiful dream should have had this ending ! Her mother's picture smiled down upon her : and she felt in her heart to wish that she too was in heaven. It might not be so very long first : her last birthday had told forty-two years. Alone with herself and her sorrow, she could own to the fact.

"The Riverence Sandwich Macfisterus," announced Bridget, flinging open the door.

Choking back the tears, hiding her swollen eyes as she best could, Miss Tamarind welcomed him in the best way that humiliation had left

possible to her. She stirred the fire into a blaze, and gave him the easiest arm-chair.

"I fear I am a little early," said the clergyman, his manner as meek, his voice as kind as ever. "But things were at sixes and sevens at the Lethridges': and I thought perhaps they would as soon I left as not."

"What was the matter?"

"His bilious attack is worse this afternoon and he is in bed. He only got out of it to flog young Dick."

"To flog young Dick!" repeated Miss Tamarind. "Oh dear!"

"It was Dick who took away your prayer-book this morning and substituted the musical-box in its place. He is always in some mischief. To do the boy justice, I don't believe he had any idea of causing such results. Mr. Lethridge, however, said a flogging would do him good, and so administered it. I left Dick howling."

"I'm sure I'm very much indebted to you for having come here," said the poor lady. "I—thought—that—you would never take any notice of me again."

"Good gracious!" cried the clergyman, in dismay. "Why I—I came, Miss Tamarind—to—to—"

"To what?" she said innocently, thinking to help him out of his perplexity.

"The fact is, I have had a Christmas box this morning, in the shape of a letter from my rector," he resumed, picking up some courage. "He has raised my stipend to a hundred and fifty, Miss Tamarind: and I hoped that—perhaps—you would not be offended at my asking you to share it. I couldn't speak while I had so little."

Miss Tamarind stared at him with all her eyes, while she took in the sense of the amazing news. And then she flung up her hands beseechingly, and burst into tears and tears.

"I don't deserve it," she sobbed. "But it—I—I have got a hundred and fifty too—and the house. That will be three hundred: and oh! I will do my very best."

"I have liked you always," he whispered, as he (this ought to be put in brackets of concealment) kissed her. Kissed her, middle-aged clergyman though he was.

Had Bridget been able to see in, just then, she would have said her piece of mistletoe had not been hung up there for nothing.

And so, in spite of the mishap, Miss Tamarind's Christmas Day had a happy ending.



THE EVENTS OF A NIGHT.

MOST of my readers will probably have forgotten an incident that took place many years ago, and at the time of its occurrence created an amount of excitement that has since been rarely equalled. I was then scarcely more than a youth ; now I am old enough—well, old enough, like Lord Chesterfield, to indite letters to my grandchildren. It is not improbable that a tragedy so exciting in those days may still bear an interest in these : I will therefore briefly relate the facts of the case, and the subsequent task I had of unravelling a mystery that for long had baffled all investigation.

It is scarcely necessary, perhaps, at this enlightened stage of the world's history, to state my utter disbelief in ghosts and ghostly visitations, in the vulgar acceptance of the term. That remarkable dreams, warnings, and presentiments do sometimes occur I cannot doubt, nor have I been ever able to understand the ridicule with which the mention of these things is met by the generality of mankind. But whilst convinced that at times the Almighty sees well to employ the medium of invisible yet direct agency in the accomplishment of His great ends, I have never been able to place faith in the belief that the spirits of the departed are permitted to return to this earth in any shape or form open to the human eye. Therefore I give forth that portion of the following incident which concerns myself, precisely as it occurred to me, utterly unable to account for it. To my readers, if they have the power, I leave the task of explanation.

In the year 1810, there stood—and is still standing—a large rambling inn, by the side of a long, straight, deserted road in Yorkshire, kept by a man and his wife, named Morrison. Very little was known of this couple, and they were not liked by the few who claimed their acquaintance. The landlord, John Morrison, was a tall, strong, burly man, with a swarthy complexion, and shoulders like a mountain. The expression of his face was heavy in the extreme, and his small, black eyes had a habit of never looking people in the face. He was usually dressed in thick corduroy trousers and waistcoat ; and in summer might almost always be seen in shirt sleeves ; his hair, black and bushy, looked as if it had been drawn through a hedge backwards ; so that, on the whole, he seldom presented an attractive picture. His wife was a true helpmate ; they must have taken a fancy to each other from a detected resemblance ; but she was quieter than her husband ; apparently more cautious and calculating. A tall, strong, bony woman, she, never seen but in one description of dress : a lilac print made so scantily that it

did not seem to admit of room for the slightest atom of under garment. But the gown, with all pertaining to Mrs. Morrison, was invariably clean and neat, and in this respect, at least, she boasted an advantage over her husband. At this period they had been tenants of the Rose and Crown for eight years, paying their way as it seemed, yet doing so little business that it was a mystery how they managed.

Although the Rose and Crown was situated on the high road along which the stage coaches travelled, passengers very seldom alighted from them for refreshment. The town of L—— was at a distance of about two miles, and the walk there was one of the loveliest imaginable. It lay between hedges, beautiful with wild roses and honeysuckle, and heavy with their scent; across fields of the greenest pasture, buoyant with the song of the lark; and, about half way, through a small coppice, or plantation of trees; which latter has long since disappeared. Does anyone recognize the locality by this short description? It is not impossible, to those who have known it in the days gone by.

The Morrisons were famous for continually changing their servants. But one maid was kept, who looked after the housework, Mrs. Morrison herself superintending such cooking as was required. Whether the place was not comfortable, or whether the loneliness of the situation was too much for the nerves of the women, it is certain that rarely could one be persuaded to stay beyond three months; and then she would leave, declaring that whilst the landlord and landlady had lived in plenty, she had been half starved.

Their present maid-servant, Kate Frost, had proved an exception to this rule, and had now been with them three-quarters of a year. She was four-and-twenty, not above the middle height, but well and even gracefully formed. She had soft dark eyes, a bright colour, and an expression of unvarying sweetness. Altogether, in manners and appearance, she was much superior to her position in life. Engaged to a young carpenter in L——, in a very good way of business, she, though not comfortable at the inn, did not care to change again for the few months she had now to remain in service. Her lover had wished her to do so; he could never imagine why she had quitted the town to bury herself at that unpopular hostelry: but Kate loved and needed the pure country air.

This obstinacy of Kate's gave George Huntly many a walk up to the Rose and Crown from L——, after his day's work: for he seemed happy only when near her. That they were most sincerely attached to each other was undoubted. Kate had made a wise choice. Throughout L—— no man was more respected, for his station, than George Huntly.

One fault he had—he was too kind-hearted: unable to say No to any one, even when it went against his better judgment. The natural consequence was that his failing was known, and advantage often taken of it. If any of his acquaintances wanted a sum of money they immedi-

ately went off to George Huntly, certain of getting it, or at least a portion of it. Often it was paid back to him in time, but on the other hand he often never saw it again.

Amongst those who had thus put themselves under an obligation to him was John Morrison, the landlord of the Rose and Crown. The sum he had borrowed was a considerable one; and now that Huntly was about to set up housekeeping and take to himself a wife, he was pressing for its repayment. Morrison had not the money in his possession, or even half the amount; and the question as to how the claim was to be met was weighing heavily upon him.

One hot, sultry evening in July, Huntly started on his walk to the Rose and Crown. The day had been bright and cloudless: rain had not fallen for some time, and nature was beginning to look parched and dusty. That morning Morrison had received a note from Huntly, sent up by one of the young lads in his employment, announcing his intended visit that evening, and insisting upon the repayment of the money.

Morrison had been dull and gloomy and ill-tempered all day in consequence of this note, for he could see no way out of his dilemma.

The day was ever afterwards associated in Mrs. Morrison's mind with a slight incident that occurred to her just before George Huntly came up. She had seated herself for a few moments upon a bench outside the inn, to catch what little breeze was blowing, when a window above her was suddenly thrown open, and a pail of water came showering down on her innocent and unsuspecting head. For a moment her breath was taken away by the shock, but as soon as that was recovered she started up from her seat, and turned her eyes upwards.

Little need, however, to seek an explanation. A wild, insensible, shriek of laughter, loud and prolonged, and the sudden banging down of the window, revealed the culprit. The act proceeded from the stable-boy, a lad less than half-witted, who had been with them now for more than four years. He seemed to be owned by nobody; none could tell who he was; of himself he had never been able to give any account, except that his name was Tim. They had found him one morning asleep in the stable loft on a bundle of hay. It happened that Morrison was just then in want of a boy, and the lad on being asked if he would take the place seemed willing enough to consent. They did not keep him too well supplied with food, but as he would eat any scraps and leavings that others refused, he thrived tolerably. All this time they had paid him no wages; he appeared to know nothing of money, its value, and uses: and he had not cost them much in clothes. Occasionally a worn out pair of breeches of his master's, which Mrs. Morrison would attempt to bring into shape by cutting off a portion of the legs, and taking in the waist: or a waistcoat that would undergo a species of the same transformation. But the lad possessed no vanity, and seemed

unconscious of the strange figure he presented. On the whole Tim was a useful and economical appendage to their establishment : he came in for the waste—like the pigs. But they soon discovered one thing—he required kind treatment. Any other discipline he would have run away from. This probably had been the real secret of his sudden appearance in the stable loft on the morning of his discovery.

Mrs. Morrison jumped up with a word that was never intended for polite ears, and shook her dripping garments, at the same time executing a kind of hornpipe in her rage and mortification.

"That there boy, again," she muttered, maddened by the thought that it was not possible to correct him. "I'll be the death of him yet, or my name's not Morrison."

As if in defiance of the threat the window again sprung up, Tim's head was thrust out shrieking with laughter, and his hands were clapped together in the extremest manifestation of glee.

Mrs. Morrison went round and disappeared, her dripping garments flopping about her legs. She mounted the broad old-fashioned staircase and caught sight of Tim at the end of the long, dark corridor : with another shake of her fist she entered her room and closed the door with a bang.

The house seemed full of these long dark corridors ; of mysterious passages which led to large wainscoted rooms, into which no one, not excepting the Morrisons, ever penetrated. The greater part of them were destitute of any other furniture than a thick coating of dust, the undisturbed accumulation of years.

But to return to George Huntly.

On his road to the Rose and Crown he had called upon an old friend who also owed him a not inconsiderable sum, and this he had succeeded in obtaining. He then proceeded on his way and reached the inn soon after Mrs. Morrison had disappeared for the purpose of changing her gown. On her return she found Huntly and her husband on the verge of a quarrel. Huntly having succeeded in one instance, seemed doubly put out at Morrison's inability to cancel his debt. He declared that the money he must and would have, and blamed Morrison for having borrowed what he seemed unable to return. He pulled out a bag of sovereigns from his pocket to show that others could come forward honourably enough and pay their debts, and passed the shining gold from one hand to the other before the greedy and ill-favoured eyes of the man and his wife.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Morrison, at last, as if a sudden idea had struck him. "You'll stay and have supper with us, and over a pot of ale I'll fix the time and manner for paying you back your loan. Go in wife, and hunt up the larder, and if it's bare send over for some sausages to the farm."

With a look from her husband she easily understood, Mrs. Morrison

went in. The farm was rather more than a mile away, and ere many minutes were over Kate issued forth in quest of the sausages.

She might have been gone some three quarters of an hour when she returned flushed and breathless. She threw down her parcel upon the table and sank into a chair.

"I don't know what's come to me lately," she said. "My breath goes at the least exertion, and I get such a pain in my side that I scarcely know how to bear it."

"And you needn't have gone, after all," returned Mrs. Morrison.

"Why not?"

"Because Huntly has gone off without his supper. You had not started ten minutes before he jumped up and declared that he had forgotten an appointment in L—— for to-night, and must go back."

"Couldn't he wait to wish me good-night?" said Kate in vexation.

"No; he said it was impossible, but he promised to come over to-morrow."

Kate said no more. Though terribly disappointed, she felt certain he would not have gone off in that sudden manner without good reason.

The next morning it was known that George Huntly was missing. As the days went on without his turning up, the matter began to be inquired into. No sign or trace of him was to be found. On quitting home that last night, he had given no orders, made no remarks; had not even told any one where he was going. The last person who had seen him in L—— was Mellish, the friend who had paid him the sum of money; but even to him he had not said that he was on his road to the Morrisons. It was, however, well known that he had been to the Rose and Crown; the Morrisons did not try to conceal it: to have done so would have been simply foolish. They were subjected to a strict examination, for they were not favourites in L——; but nothing could be gained from them either in elucidation of the mystery, or as tending to throw suspicion on themselves. Every possible inquiry was instituted; every imaginable search made; for weeks and even months after, the matter was not allowed to rest; but George Huntly remained absent, and his absence unaccounted for. After a time the episode began to be forgotten by the world, until at length, even in L——, it ceased to be anything but an occasional and passing topic of conversation.

Two years moved on. Although the mystery connected with George Huntly died out from the minds of men, it remained fresh in my own. I could not forget it; could not help frequently dwelling upon it, and wondering what had become of him. During this time I had not lost sight of Kate Frost. She had left the Morrisons immediately after the disappearance, and come to live in L——. I would frequently call to see her, and talk with her upon the matter which was eating away her

life. I could see her visibly fading; each succeeding visit proving her weaker and more fragile than the last. Sooner or later, it would doubtless have been so in any case, but this blow had hastened the disease. And now, at the end of two years, the struggle was nearly over.

One evening I received a message from her, asking me to go round, if convenient. I immediately did so, and found her lying in an easy chair before the open window. She smiled faintly as I went up to her and took her hand in mine—so thin, and worn, and transparent, that I could almost see through it.

"Thank you for coming, sir," she said, speaking scarcely above a whisper, and with difficulty. "Thank you for all your kindness and sympathy. It has helped me wonderfully to bear my trial. But it is just over."

I was about to expostulate with her for indulging in thoughts so gloomy, but she stopped me at once.

"Why should you?" she asked. "I know it. I feel that I am going—that I am all but gone. And I am glad. I shall once more meet George; meet him where we need not part again; meet him where what has been mystery here will be mystery no longer."

"But, Kate," I said, "George Huntly may yet be in the world."

"No, no," she replied, with as much energy as she could command. "I feel it, I know it. Had he been in the world, nothing would have kept him from me these two years; not all the prisons and impediments in existence. Nothing but death. He is dead, sir. I know it, and have known it from the first."

"But you must have cause for this certainty," I urged. "Some suspicion of what became of him?"

"I have had that always," she answered: "and now, in my last hours, the conviction is stronger upon me than ever."

"You have never mentioned this to me, Kate."

"I dared not, sir. I feared it might somehow come to their ears, and that I, too, might disappear from amongst you. But I will tell you now; now I am beyond the reach of all human power."

She paused for some minutes to recover strength, then said what she had to tell me in as few words as possible.

"You remember, sir, where George spent his last evening?"

"I do."

"You remember that I was sent out on an errand, and that when I returned he was no longer there?"

"I remember that also."

"Very well. Mr. Morrison owed him a sum of money, which he could not repay him. George, on the other hand, would not be put off. Thus, you see, they had a cause for wishing him out of the way."

"I see."

"You remember also that it was proved he must have had a considerable sum of money about him that night, given to him by Mr. Mellish?"

"Kate, I have forgotten nothing. It is all as fresh in my memory as though it had occurred yesterday."

"I believe it, sir. George was as open as the day. It no doubt would come out in the course of conversation with the Morrisons that he had this money about him, in gold. This would be a great temptation to them; such a temptation as you, who have never known the want of money, could scarcely realize. Thus, you see at once, a double motive for wishing him out of the way."

"I see."

"Well, sir, that's all. I have no more to say. You can supply the remainder for yourself."

"You think, Kate, that—that—I scarcely like to say it—these Morrisons could explain the mystery?"

"I do, sir. I firmly believe that poor George came by his death at their hands."

"And yet, how could it be? Remember how strictly they were examined. How could they have disposed of——"

"Ah, sir," she interrupted, "I don't pretend to furnish details; I give you only the bare, broad fact. I am dying, but you will probably live to see my words verified. Think of them; do not forget them; mark them: *sooner or later, justice will overtake those people. Their sin will find them out.*"

Kate died that night, and her words left a solemn impression upon me, as if they had been the words of the dead. For months after I had them ringing in my ears; I would wake up with them in the night; would dream that I had at last brought home the crime to its perpetrator; and I would spring out of bed only to clutch at the darkness I never forgot them; and in some unaccountable manner a conviction of their truth was forced upon me. Time rolled on and the matter still remained a mystery; but my conviction did not weaken.

Twenty years passed away. The words sound like an age; but, looking back, they span themselves into a very small compass. During that time things had changed with me, as they seem to change with most of us. Though little more than a youth at the time of Kate Frost's death, I was now a sober, steady-going man, nearly forty years of age. I was now filling my place in the world, performing my allotted task. I had married and had children around me—an equivalent to saying that I had upon me my share of care and responsibility. True, Fortune had been kind to me, but Time had robbed me of more than Fortune could give. In those twenty years many of the old landmarks of my life had been removed, and some of earth's dearest ties broken. Now, the shadows are passing away shortly to

give place to the glorious sunshine of Eternity; that new world where we shall meet again those who have crossed its threshold before us; that new world where alone the spirit of man will be at rest from that strange, ceaseless craving after the Infinite from which in this world it is never free.

I had left L—— for London, and as is frequently the case, I had never revisited the old place. Now, after the lapse of many years, I was about to return to those early scenes, though from motives of business and not pleasure. Of pleasure, indeed, I anticipated none: far from it. I was going back a stranger to a land where once I had known every face I met, and had been a favourite with most people. During this long period nothing had transpired to throw any light on the mystery of George Huntly's disappearance: the matter had ceased to be remembered.

I went down into Yorkshire by the old coach, and we neared the town of L—— towards eight in the evening. We were approaching the end of October, and the night was dark and cold. As we drew towards L—— a sudden impulse prompted me to alight at the Rose and Crown—should the inn be still in existence. I put the question to the old coachman by whose side I was seated.

"You mean the one we are coming to, I suppose, sir," he replied. "A large rambling inn about two miles this side L——, kept by a man named Morrison."

"The very place," I answered. "Is John Morrison still the landlord?"

"Yes, sir. But few passengers trouble the place. No one knows how he manages to make it answer."

At certain times of my life I have had impulses, promptings—call them what you will—towards a certain course of action. At such times I have found it almost impossible to resist them; and it has invariably proved that had I done so, it would have gone hard with me. To-night the impulse was upon me to alight at the Rose and Crown: I could but obey it.

The coach stopped, and I got down and entered the inn. I looked round. Everything appeared precisely as I had left it so many years ago; nothing seemed changed, nothing out of place. The very chairs were the same, and in the same position. The same old clock stood mournfully ticking against the wall, apparently never having been moved. A chambermaid came forward, and I asked for a room for the night. She seemed surprised at the unusual demand, but said I could have one. Then I inquired about supper. She replied that they had nothing but a few pork sausages in the house, some fresh eggs, bread, butter, and cheese. With these I was obliged to be content. As she mentioned the sausages, in a moment I remembered Kate Frost's errand that July evening twenty-two years ago, and the coincidence struck me as singular.

Whilst my supper was being prepared, I sat down in the parlour and fell into a train of thought. Overcome with fatigue, I dropped into a sleep and dreamed. I seemed in my dream to be still pursuing the train of thought into which my mind had wandered. I lived over again the last twenty years of my life, in every minute particular; but instead of beginning at the beginning, I lived them backwards, and went downwards instead of upwards in the scale of time. Every minute incident of my life was brought vividly before me; every action I had done, good, bad, and indifferent, passed in review. Once more it was that warm evening in the which I had been summoned to the dying bed of Kate Frost; once more I stood speaking with her face to face, holding her hand, which in my dream, so vivid was it, shone out worn and thin and transparent. Our conversation was repeated, and at the last I started up with her words ringing in my ear: "*Sooner or later, justice will overtake those people. Their sin will find them out.*"

I started up, and there, before me, the very embodiment of an evil spirit, stood John Morrison. I could not see that he had changed in the slightest degree with the lapse of time, except that his hair had gone grey. Still the same big, burly, broad-shouldered man, with the same evil spirit, and dark, repelling countenance. In the first moment of waking I could have shouted under the influence of some inexplicable feeling: then I remembered where I was, and turned to the clock. I had been asleep just ten minutes; had compressed into that space of time a great portion of my life.

"I fear my entrance has disturbed you, sir," were the first words he uttered. "You seem tired."

"Not at all," I replied. "It must have been the sudden change from cold and darkness to the light and warmth of the room that caused me to fall asleep. Your entrance did not awaken me. You don't seem to have many visitors here."

"Not many, sir."

"I hope it is convenient for me to stay the night?"

"Convenient enough, sir, if you can put up with the accommodation. We seldom get customers now, and don't prepare for them."

The chambermaid came in at this moment and began laying the cloth. My supper was soon ready, and the landlord prepared to wait on me.

"Have you any good wine?" I asked.

"No, sir," he replied. "We have some capital ale, and a little good brandy in the house, but that's all."

"That will do," I said. "Bring me some ale; after supper, if I want it, I will try your brandy."

He left the room and soon returned with a jug of the foaming liquor. I was thirsty, and found it, as he had said, very good.

"I have not been in this neighbourhood for some time," I remarked

after a pause ; "in early youth I was very familiar with it. Have there been many changes in L—— during the last fifteen or twenty years ?"

"Pretty well, sir," he returned. "More than usually occur in that time, I believe. I have had my share of them."

"Indeed ? Nothing very serious, I hope ?"

"For one thing I lost my wife three years ago," he answered, not betraying, I thought, any deep regret. "She died after a week's illness."

So Mrs. Morrison was dead ! And part of Kate Frost's words were void. Retribution had not overtaken *her*, in this world, at any rate.

"I am sorry to hear it, landlord. I remember her well. I remember you also, though you appear to have forgotten me. No doubt I am much changed."

"I confess I can't bring you to my memory, sir," he replied, looking at me half furtively. And I mentioned my name to him.

"Ah, yes ! now I do remember you," he said, his manner increasing in respect. "But you know I did not see much of you in those days. I remember, though, how sorry all the town was when you married and went away to London. I hope, sir, if you have seen changes, they have been pleasant ones."

"Some of both," I replied, sighing involuntarily ; "some of both, Mr. Morrison. We have to take the rough with the smooth, the bitter with the sweet in this world. It would be difficult to find a man with a lot perfectly free from trouble of one kind or another. By the way," I continued, changing my tone, "has anything ever turned up respecting that strange disappearance of—of—"

"George Huntly ?" he said, supplying the deficiency. His tone and countenance did not change. The subject seemed to him an indifferent one.

"Ay !" I cried. "That's the man. George Huntly."

"Nothing whatever, sir."

"Then the matter still remains in darkness ?"

"As completely as in its first days, sir. You never hear it mentioned now. For my own part I had completely forgotten all about it."

I looked at him as keenly as I dared. His face was unconcerned, his voice careless. I wondered whether this was the result of conscience, hardened or innocent.

"Ah !" I said, "people supposed him murdered, but that could hardly have been, as his body was never found. Probably he had got into private trouble, of which the world knew nothing, and is at this time making his way in some other portion of the globe."

"Most probably," replied Morrison ; and for the first time I perceived in him an anxiety to change the subject.

After supper I took a glass of hot brandy-and-water, and about ten o'clock retired to my chamber. Previously to this, whilst the landlord

was out of the room, I had slipped into a small portmanteau that I did not require, a five-pound note, having taken the number and put my initials on the back. Then I restraped, but did not lock, the portmanteau, which I purposely left in the parlour. My motive for doing this I could hardly explain, even to myself; but I was obeying one of those flashes of impulse before alluded to.

I entered my bedroom, closed the door, and looked around me. It was a large, lofty room, barely furnished, but made comfortable by the reflection of a fire which burnt brightly in the grate. A piece of carpet was spread by the bedside, another in front of the washhandstand; a rug before the fire; for the rest, bare boards. But this I did not mind. The bed, a large four-poster, stood in one corner of the room, devoid of curtains; this also I did not mind, having satisfied myself that the sheets were well aired. Placing the candle on a small table in front of the fire, I took off my boots, and stuck my feet in the fender. I had come up to my room, but not immediately did I intend to turn in. I wanted to be alone with my own thoughts. My dream had left a vivid impression upon me that I could not shake off, and I wished to dwell upon it. What strange impulse had prompted me to come to this inn? this uncomfortable place that people were only too glad to pass by? What purpose was it to answer? I did not half like it. Without being anything of a coward I felt it an unpleasant sensation to find myself the guest of a man whom I suspected of—I hardly knew what. And as the feeling gained upon me I crossed the room and examined the fastenings of my door. The key was in the lock, and it turned easily; my position was made doubly secure by a good, strong bolt, which I slipped with a comfortable feeling of security. Other doors were in the room, at the further end; one opposite the other. These also I examined; both were bolted on the inside and locked, and the keys taken away. But the locks looked old and rusty, as if they had not been turned for many a long day, and I felt that I need fear no intrusion from that quarter. Therefore I dismissed the matter from my mind. I then returned to my seat and tried to reconcile myself to my position. Falling into a train of thought, deep and long, I became lost to all sense of outward things. At length I was suddenly aroused by the fire; having burnt to a hollow it gave way with a crash. The noise was slight enough, but it broke on the stillness of the room with something of the effect of a cannon-ball. It caused me to jump up and look at my watch. Half-past eleven. I had mused away nearly an hour and a half. The fire was waning; the candle seemed to burn with a yellow light; the room appeared full of shadows cast by the flickering flame, and I found myself cold and uncomfortable. I went to the window, and drew up the blinds; the clouds had cleared away; the heavens were bright with stars and the light of the moon. I pulled out a small pocket Bible from my bag—I had had it all those long years, and it is still my

companion—and for a time tried to banish earthly thoughts. Then I undressed and was quickly between the sheets. I suppose I was tired; for, despite the strange bed and my somewhat unsettled state of mind, I believe that my head had not been on the pillow five minutes before I was in a sound sleep.

How long it lasted I did not know; but I was suddenly aroused to the full possession of my senses by a voice speaking to me. I woke with the sound ringing in my ear, and distinctly remembered them: the voice also seemed familiar. These were the words:—

“The time has at length come. Rise from your bed; open the left-hand door and go down the passage; enter the room at the end. The key of your own door will admit you.”

The words were ringing in my ear: the voice was the voice of Kate Frost.

I started up, conscious of an imperceptible movement in the room. There, between the window and the bed, stood the faint, shadowy outline of a figure; shadowy, yet distinctly visible. I should have recognized the form amidst a thousand. Just then a cloud passed from the moon, and the bright light shone full upon the face. It needed not this confirmation to my vision. The features were those of Kate Frost—such as I had seen them on that last night. The form pointed to the door indicated by the words. For a moment I felt paralyzed and could neither move nor speak. Then I sprang out of bed, and called Kate by her name; but as I approached the figure it suddenly disappeared, and I felt myself alone.

For some moments I stood still. I was covered from head to foot with perspiration, the result of the strange apparition upon my mind. Then, as its influence began to weaken, I commenced to disbelieve my senses and to doubt my eyesight. I called myself a fool for fancying an impossibility, and attributed the whole thing to the effect of a dream. The cold warned me that I was running a risk, and I once more got into bed. I determined to shake it off; to take no heed of the strange words, doubtless but a part of the dream—the result of the current into which my thoughts had turned. I made strong efforts to get to sleep again, and after a time succeeded.

Once more I know not how long I had slept, when for the second time I was aroused by a voice ringing in my ears. Tone and words were distinctly remembered by me.

“Why have you not obeyed me? For the second time I bid you rise. Open yonder door and enter the room at the end of the long corridor. You will then know how to act.”

I started up and looked out into the room, this time only to feel rather than see a faint shadow disappearing, noiselessly as a shadow leaves the earth when cast by a cloud crossing the moon.

I could no longer doubt the evidence of some power at work upon

me : what that power was I knew not : how far reality, how far dream, I could not tell. But of one thing I was now determined : I would obey the summons as far as I was able, and see if it brought forth any result.

I jumped out of bed with, I confess, a strange and most uncomfortable feeling upon me. I struck a light and partially dressed myself. Then I took the key from my door, crossed over to the one indicated, and tried the lock. The key turned more easily than I anticipated, and the door opened with a harsh, jarring sound. A rush of cold air came in and half blew out my candle, causing me to shiver and think myself a simpleton for leaving my warm bed. Taking the key from the lock, I boldly stepped into the passage, which was long and narrow, and seemed not to have been entered for a considerable time, so thick was the dust upon the floor. I walked to the end of the passage which terminated in nothing but a door. I turned the handle and found it locked. Then I inserted the key into this lock also ; it fitted ; I opened it and entered the room.

At first I could distinguish nothing around me ; but a strong, musty, stifling smell almost took my breath away. The room had evidently long been closed up. I soon perceived a small table in the centre, and upon going up observed upon it a pocket-book and a few papers covered in dust and yellow with age. At the further end was a large bed, similar to mine, but hung round with curtains. I advanced towards it and a sight met my gaze which is as distinctly visible to me to-day as it was in that first terrible moment of discovery. The candle almost dropped from my hand ; every drop of blood seemed to go from my heart. And yet, even in that first moment, Kate Frost's last words recurred to me with a sadder reality and significance than they had ever possessed. There, upon the bed, was stretched a skeleton ; doubtless the skeleton of a man ; doubtless that of the unfortunate George Huntly.

Luckily for me, I was a man of strong nerves and great presence of mind. What might have proved too much for others did not rob me of my calmness and judgment. I quietly considered what would be the best thing to do. I went back to the table and looked down at the papers and pocket-book without touching them. One was a letter upon which, spite of time and dust, I could faintly trace the name of George Huntly. Leaving all untouched, but sufficiently satisfied with this proof, I left the room, and locked the door, and went back to my own chamber. I got into bed again but did not attempt to sleep. I lay awake ; thinking of what I had seen ; of the past ; of the long, long mystery, which to me was now cleared up ; and of what was before me. I had a duty to perform, and a very painful one : a duty from which I shrank, but which I knew must be accomplished. As I thought over all this, the hours passed away, and the twilight quietly stole into the sky. I watched the dawn gradually spreading over the face of the earth and unrolling.

all its beauties as they must have unrolled at the creation of the world's first morning. Then I got up and dressed.

At eight o'clock I went down into the parlour and found breakfast already laid for me, and a fire burning in the grate. In the corner stood my portmanteau apparently untouched, as I had left it the previous night. During a few minutes' solitude I hastily unstrapped it, and looked in. The note was gone.

I made no remark. Breakfast came in, and after a silent meal I paid my bill and started off for L——; a boy carrying my luggage. Tim, by the way, had disappeared one morning, years ago, as mysteriously as he had appeared, and was recognized by an inhabitant of L—— some months after, working in the fields in the adjoining county of Lincoln.

I first attended to my own business, and that disposed of, I set about the accomplishment of my more painful task. It would be tedious and unnecessary to enter into minute details of what ensued. The crime was distinctly brought home to John Morrison, who confessed to it, after trying for a short while to brave it out. But the proofs were too strong against him, and he gave in.

He admitted that he had struck George Huntly a blow so well aimed that it killed him on the spot. Not knowing what to do with the body he had taken it up into that room, the existence of which was known only to himself and his wife. He had intended to bury the body subsequently, but something had always arisen to prevent him, until at length he dared not approach the room. No one had been near it from that time. The bedroom I occupied that night had been given to me in mistake by the chambermaid, and Morrison had not found it out until too late to be rectified. But he thought it of little consequence: the doors were locked and the keys out: he had never discovered that one key would open all. His wife, he confessed, had had no hand in the crime, but on the contrary had endeavoured to dissuade him from it. I may add that my five-pound note was found upon him when he was first taken, and returned to me; thus proving that neither the loss of his wife, nor any other cause, had had any good effect upon his nature.

Morrison was tried at the ensuing assizes and found guilty; and in due time suffered the extreme penalty of the law. One more instance in the annals of history of the terrible certainty of retribution.

But what about my own singular part in the matter? What about the voice, and the vision, and the words—all twice repeated? This I cannot attempt to explain. Perhaps it was nothing but an over-wrought brain; a dream, a fancy, a delusion. And yet when I consider the result—the effects which followed—I am lost in wonder. Many years have since rolled by, but that wonder has never diminished. I solved one mystery only to be plunged into another, deeper and more subtle. To me it has never been explained.

ABOUT CORAL.

THERE are few substances in nature that suggest a wider range of thought or appeal more forcibly to the imagination than coral. We take up a string of coral beads and where do they lead us? To the surf breaking over reefs in far tropical seas; to the blue waters that lave the shores of sunny Sicily; to ancient times when all that was beautiful or extraordinary in nature was supposed to be gifted with wonder-working powers. The toils and dangers of mariners; the speculations of sages; the disputations of men of science; the marvels of the animal kingdom: all these things present themselves to the mind in writing the simple word coral.

The Greeks named coral the "daughter of the sea;" and Theophrastus reckons it amongst the precious stones. Pliny tells us that coral was no less esteemed in India than were pearls in Rome, "it being the prevailing taste in each nation respectively that constitutes the value of things," he observes. "Solimus informs us," so he continues, "that Zoroaster attributed certain mysterious properties to coral; hence it is that they equally value it as an ornament and as an object of devotion."

In Persia, China, and Japan, coral was prized almost as much as gold. The Gauls in ancient times were accustomed to ornament their armour with this lovely product of the Gallic and Italian seas; but finding the value of it as an article of exportation, it soon became comparatively rare in the countries where it at first abounded.

Pliny describes coral as a marine plant bearing crimson berries; nor can we wonder that he should have been led into this mistake when we find the error repeated almost down to our own times. In Johnson's Dictionary is the following definition: "Coral—a plant of as great hardness and stony nature while growing in the water as it is after long exposure to the air."

Coming down to the mediæval age, the first mention we have of coral is in the inventory of Alianore de Bohun, where a paternoster of coral with gilded guadier, and three branches of coral, are amongst the list of valuables. Quite as many superstitious beliefs were then attached to this supposed submarine plant as in a more remote period. Reginald Scot in his "Discoverie of Witchcraft" tells us that "the coral preserveth such as wear it from fascination or bewitching, and in this respect they are hanged about children's necks." Plat in his "Jewel House of Nature" repeats the same story, adding that it preserves from the falling sickness, "it hath also some special sympathy with nature," he continues, "for the best coral being worn about the neck will turn pale and wan if

the party that wears it be sick, and comes to its former colour again as they recover health."

In 1700 Tournefort described coral as a plant; and Réaumur declared it as his opinion, but slightly differing from former naturalists, that it was the stony product of marine plants. The Count di Marsigli went a step further, and not only asserted the vegetable nature of coral but declared that he had seen its flowers! In his work "*La Physique de la Mer*" he gives a representation of these sea blossoms, thus setting the question at rest for ever, as he supposed. Others however were not quite so well satisfied: and in 1723 Jean André de Peyssonel, a student of medicine and natural history, was deputed by the French Academie des Sciences to make further observations in elucidation of this interesting subject. He began his examinations first in the neighbourhood of Marseilles, and continued them on the north coast of Africa. At last, after long, exact, and delicate observation, he came to the conclusion that the Count di Marsigli's flowers were animals, and demonstrated that the coral was no plant but the product of a colony of polypi. Let him describe his experiment in his own words.

"I put the flower of the coral in vases full of sea-water, and I saw that what had been taken for the flower of this pretended plant was, in truth, only an insect like a little sea-nettle or polype. I had the pleasure of seeing move the claws or feet of the creature; and having put the vase full of water which contained the coral in a gentle heat over the fire, all the small insects seemed to expand. The polype extended his feet, and formed what M. di Marsigli and I had taken for the petals of a flower. The calyx of this pretended flower, in short, was the animal which advanced and issued out of its shell."

But after all Peyssonel's labours, he received neither reward nor thanks for his discovery: it was ridiculed by Réaumur and Bernard de Jussieu, as something quite unworthy of credit; and poor Peyssonel, meeting with nothing but scepticism and neglect—for his papers were not even printed—in return for his laborious investigations, abandoned the subject in disgust, and departed for the Antilles in the capacity of naval surgeon. Peyssonel was allowed to continue in the obscurity to which he had retired; but many years had not passed before both Réaumur and De Jussieu were obliged to retract their former opinion, and to acknowledge that after all Peyssonel's theory was correct.

Since that time full light has been thrown upon this wonder-working zoophite by successive naturalists. But before describing the actual manner in which coral is formed, let us, by the help Schleiden gives us in his interesting and valuable work "*Das Meer*," take a glance at the haunts of the fabled mermaid, "where the rocks of coral grow." In the basin of the Mediterranean Sea are forests of coral, wondrous as the enchanted gardens of fairy land. Crimson leafless shrubs bearing apparently delicate star-like white flowers; madrepores, and sea-fans

with their exquisite perforated tracery, form the mimic trees; flustræ and escharæ adhere like parti-coloured lichens to the stems, and yellow, green, and purple limpets cling to the branches. Living flowers, gorgeous as beds of variegated ranunculus, brilliant as cactus blossoms, spread their tentaculæ from the rocks or sparkling sands. Myriad little fishes, brilliant with metallic hues, gold and green, or silvery white, sport amongst the coral stems; and strange creatures, the gleaming bandfish, and diaphanous, mysterious cuttle-fish, glide through the thickets in search of prey. At night these submarine forests are lighted up by millions of microscopic medusæ, and crustaceans, and pale greenish phosphorescent sea-pens. A world of wonder and beauty for ever hidden save to the eye of the adventurous diver; but even into this "ocean-world," man's rapaciousness and daring have plunged to extract treasures for his use and adornment.

Figuier describes the branch of living coral as "an aggregate of animals derived from a first being by budding. They are united amongst themselves by a common tissue, each polype seeming to enjoy a life of its own, though participating in a common object. The branch seems to originate in an egg, which produces a young animal, which attaches itself soon after its birth. From this is derived the new beings which, by their united labours, produce the branch of coral. The branch is composed of two distinct parts: the one central of a hard, brittle, strong nature, the coral of commerce; the other, altogether external, like the bark of a tree, soft, fleshy, and easily impressed with the nail. This is essentially the bed of the living colony. The first is called the polypier, the second is the colony of polypes."

It would seem that islands and reefs of coral have been formed by subsidence and upheaval; as the living polype is seldom found at less than five fathoms in depth, or more than a hundred and fifty. Humboldt says that the so-called coral rocks that rise above the water are only brescia, or aggregate of fragments of madreporæ cemented by carbonate of lime, broken shells and sand. When the colony of polypi becomes extinct, its habitation gradually falls into decay, the branches are snapped off, and fall to pieces. They then become cemented and form rocks as above described, upon these new colonies are founded, and fresh coral forests spring into being to go through the same process and to serve in their turn as foundation for a new race of tiny architects. These builders are all submarine, no living coral branch appears above the surface of the sea, so that there must be other powers of nature at work before islands arise to afford nourishment to the palm, or a footing place for man.

The coral fishing is carried on almost entirely by sailors from Genoa, Leghorn, and Naples. It is a laborious business, so much so that it is a common saying in Italy that only thieves or assassins should go to the coral fishery. The boats employed are from six to fifteen tons;

they are manned by a captain or padrone, and eight or ten sailors. The machine employed is of wood something resembling a heavy cart wheel without rim and with few spokes. A large stone is attached to the centre to assist its descent as well as to break the coral. To this machine are fastened nets to receive the fragments of rock and coral that are broken off. The whole is attached to a capstan by strong ropes. When the coral bed is reached, the machine is thrown overboard and the speed of the vessel slackened. Six or eight men labour at the capstan, while the others are left free to guide the boat. The heavy wooden machine bumping and tearing at the uneven rocks below, causes the boat to reel and jerk every moment, and the fatigue of drawing up the laden nets is enormous. Sometimes large fragments of rock are brought up to which coral is attached. While the crew are employed in breaking off and gathering together the coral, the machine is hung at the side of the boat ready for a fresh venture. Finally when the fishing is completed, the coral branches are cleansed from the shells and parasites that adhere to them, and the boat sails for Messina, Naples, Genoa, or other port where the manufacturers of coral ornaments purchase their cargo.

The pure rose-coloured coral is the rarest and most expensive; the more ordinary crimson coral is separated into four qualities. The first, the largest and richest in hue, is sold for from thirty shillings to two pounds per pound. The second, smaller in size but still of a good colour and free from holes, brings in from eight to ten shillings per pound. The third quality is dead coral that has fallen from its stem and become blanched, or "*sbianchito*" as the Italians call it. This is always perforated and is of comparatively little value. The fourth is that which has been washed up by the sea, "*terraglio*" it is called; this is half decomposed, colourless, and of very little value.

Schleiden states that the produce of the coral fishery of Bona and La Calle alone, in the year 1853 amounted to £85,920. There are manufactories of coral ornaments at Naples, and various other towns on the coast of Italy, and also at Cassis near Marseilles. The coral when intended for beads is first cut into segments with a fine circular saw, and then turned in a lathe. This manufacture gives employment to women as well as men. Lamartine's description of Graziella, where she goes to the balcony to shake the crimson dust out of her hair, will be remembered.

Amongst articles of coral produced at Naples, are the amulets, generally in the form of a small hand, preservative against the influence of the "evil eye." It would be difficult to credit that such a belief as that of the evil eye can linger in modern times were not the fact asserted on good authority. Count Arrivabene relates an anecdote of Ferdinand II. of Naples, who it seems was a firm believer in this superstition. The king once gave a ball at the Caserta, or summer palace, to which

all the nobility were invited but one prince. On the master of the ceremonies venturing to inquire the cause of this omission, the king replied that the prince was a "jettature," and he would not admit him. His majesty's objection was however overruled, and the prince was invited. When he made his appearance in the ballroom all the guests shrank from him, and the king perceiving this, good-naturedly took him by the arm, and to draw his attention away from the slight received, pointed out to him a large chandelier, remarkable for its beauty. No sooner however had the prince glanced at it, than it fell with a tremendous crash, severely injuring several of the guests. It is needless to say that the unfortunate nobleman was never again invited to the palace.

Coral, when introduced with taste, forms an elegant addition to precious stones. A parure of diamonds and pink coral was one of the most admired articles of jewelry displayed in the great Exhibition of 1851. It is occasionally cut in cameo, though the specimens are rare; and more rare still is its introduction into architectural ornament. In the church of San Roc at Lisbon is an altar of Carrara marble decorated with carved foliage of crimson coral in high relief. This exquisite work of art cost an almost fabulous sum.

Coral is also applied with great effect to the ornamenting of caskets, cups, and various articles of *vertu*.

Though we no longer fear the malevolence of witches, or require amulets to guard us from imaginary evils, we still delight in the beautiful stones; and surely the marvels that science has revealed are as great as those of the superstitions we have discarded. Few greater wonders in nature are there than the work of those countless myriads of little polypi known as coral.



OUT IN THE STREETS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

A COMMODIOUS house, standing within its large walled garden, near to Kensington : and the time the first half of the year 1866.

The bay-window stood open to the lawn : you could step out from it at will. Seated at the breakfast table, its fair white cloth spread with pretty china and silver, was Robert Seaton : a slender man of middle height, and very pleasant, but rather sensitive face : his age some seven-and-twenty years.

His wife was opposite to him. She wore a blue muslin gown, and they were laughing over it. It had shrunk in the washing : the sleeves were short ; the waist would not come together by any dint of pulling. Mrs. Seaton had secured it with pins, but there shone a great gap.

"I must say it looks admirably tidy," observed Mr. Seaton. "Quite a pattern to be studied."

"Be quiet, Robert. Had I stayed to put on another, you would have had to wait for breakfast. Who was to suppose it would shrink like this ! And so pretty as it was ! Becoming too."

"Don't be vain, Anne."

She laughed a little. He went on with his breakfast, glancing ever and anon at the May flowers, springing up in the garden beds. The sun shone down, the grass was green, the young leaves wore their delicate and most beautiful tint ; the blossoms were of a gay sweetness.

"I forgot to tell you, Anne," he suddenly exclaimed, looking up at his wife. "Charles has got his company."

"Has he ! How do you know ?"

"I read it yesterday in the Indian news."

"Oh," returned Mrs. Seaton—and there was a shade of disappointment in her tone. "I thought—perhaps—"

"Perhaps what ?"

"That they might have written to tell you from Seaton Farm."

"No fear of that, Anne. They don't write to me. Never mind, my dear. We can do without it."

Mrs. Seaton gently pushed back her pretty brown hair—a habit of hers when thoughtful or vexed. The hair was of nearly the same shade as her husband's ; but his eyes were brown, hers grey. She had delicate features and a clear, healthy, sensible face : otherwise there was not much beauty in it to boast of.

The handle of the door was turned and twisted by inexperienced hands, and a little girl of four, with bright eager eyes and fair flowing curls, came bounding into the room.

"Dood morning, pa-pa ; dood morning, mam-ma ! Kiss Annie."

She had no need to say Kiss Annie. They were ready always, the father especially, to devour with kisses this, their first-born child. Robert Seaton took her on his knee, and fondly stroked her hair.

"Where's Paul ?" he asked presently.

"Paul been naughty," said the child, whose tongue was backward for her age. "Nurse not let him come. He trew his bread-butter in de fender."

A servant came in to say the brougham was at the door. Robert Seaton, remarkably punctual in regard to his business hours, was ready for it.

"Good-bye, my dear."

Stooping to kiss his wife, he touched the gap in the blue gown quite satirically, and laughed. She said it would be made right before the morrow: but he whispered that he thought he must bring her a new one from town. Paul, a young gentleman of three with great grey eyes, was descending the stairs, his nurse behind him. Robert Seaton caught him up, tossed him, kissed him, put him down again, and went out to his carriage.

Mrs. Seaton, busy with her little ones, her servants, her household matters generally, and with some friends who came to see her, passed through the day much as usual. One of them, Miss Barle, stayed to dinner. Robert Seaton was late for it—a very unusual thing—and they sat down alone. Close upon that, the brougham was heard driving in with him. He passed up-stairs to his dressing-room: and certainly did not seem to hurry himself when there.

"What kept you, Robert ?" asked his wife, when he appeared.

"Business," he shortly answered.

Miss Barle ; a tall, angular, sunny-hearted maiden of eight-and-thirty, who protested she'd not get married, though the best man in Christendom came to beg her on his knees ; talked and laughed as was her wont. People were apt to say that when Elizabeth Barle was present, nobody else could get in a word edgeways. Nevertheless, before the dinner was over, Mrs. Seaton remarked that her husband was unusually silent, and sent away his plate each time nearly untouched.

"Is anything the matter, Robert ?"

"The matter ? Oh, my head aches a little."

He sat back on the sofa in the drawing-room, still as death. Miss Barle asked him to sing. He came forward at once, and sang a song, and then another that they opened for him, Mrs. Seaton playing. But he seemed to do it all mechanically, his wife thought ; as though his mind were pre-occupied ; and she could not quite make it out. Robert Seaton's voice was a very attractive one—full of sweet melody. They could have listened to it for hours. But he sat down again, saying he had had a tiring day in the city, and relapsed into reverie.

At bed-time, after Miss Barle had left, and Mrs. Seaton had gone on upstairs, he rose from his seat, like a man released from some restraining fetters, to pace the room with uneven steps. His face was full of care, his mind of doubt and agony. A frightful trouble had fallen on Robert Seaton, and he knew not how to tell his wife. He decided *not* to tell her: perhaps it might not turn out so badly as it threatened.

In the morning, after tossing and turning all night like a man in a fever, he went off to the city early. His wife could not imagine what was the matter. In regard to affairs, they were so largely prosperous that her thoughts never turned to them: but, rather, to family matters.

"I hope there's no ill news from Seaton Farm—or from his brother in India!"

Ah, no; it was neither one nor the other. The mid-day sun had not reached its full height when Miss Barle came in, her face white and shrunken.

"My dear, tell me the truth outright," she said, catching hold of Mrs. Seaton as the servant closed the door. "I can bear the worst of certainty better than suspense."

"The truth about what?" exclaimed the poor young wife, stricken with some unknown fear.

Miss Barle questioned her face closely. "Do you know of *nothing* amiss?" she asked. "Have you heard nothing?"

"Nothing whatever. You must tell me what you mean."

"They say that Overend and Gurneys have gone. All to smash."

Just at the first moment, Mrs. Seaton did not perceive what the "going" of Overend and Gurneys had to do with her or Miss Barle. "Dear me!" she said. "Well?"

"Child, don't you understand? It will be next door to a national ruin. Some banks closed yesterday; others close to-day. That's not all. The—need I speak? I shall shock you."

Ah, Mrs. Seaton comprehended now. Her lips grew white: her imploring fingers entwined themselves round the arm of Miss Barle. That lady finished in a whisper.

"The 'Great Loan and Discount' must fall with them."

For two or three minutes there ensued a silence: the two women sitting together side by side, neither daring to speak.

"I am not sure that I should have come in, but that I thought assuredly your husband must have told you," resumed Miss Barle, with hesitation. "I came to ask you for news—hoping to gather a grain or two of comfort. I thought you might know that—perhaps—he might have made himself a little safe: also me. Poor me!"

But Mrs. Seaton had not one single grain of comfort to give. Her senses seemed to be in a chaos, her mind was in a state of bewilderment. All she could long for now was to see her husband, that she might learn the best and the worst.

Before the day was over, other friends had called, dismay on their countenances, wild stories of ruin on their tongues; and bearing the most improbable rumours of the unexampled panic in the city. At least, they sounded improbable to Mrs. Seaton's terrified ears.

They came and went, these callers, and the day wore on with its accustomed routine. Household arrangements were uninterrupted; meal-times came round, and the table was spread. In the midst of our greatest woes, the house must on. What a mockery it all seemed to the heart of the stricken wife, waiting and watching in her suspense.

Six o'clock, and the dinner waiting: but no master came home to eat it. The brougham returned without him. Seven o'clock: eight; nine; ten; eleven. Anne Seaton had crept to the hall door, to watch and listen. All kinds of dreadful improbabilities kept surging through her brain. Had he *died* of the shock; the ruin? Had the blow been so fierce as to overturn his reason, and he had been unable to bear up against it? Never, to the latest day of her life, will she forget that night's watching, as she sat on the door-step.

The clock was striking twelve when her husband came up the gravel path; fagged, pale, worn. There had been a meeting of the board, and that had detained him. In the momentous calamity that was looming, the members had sat far into the night, discussing—not how to avert it, for that would be impossible, but what extent of ruin it would bring on their own individual selves. Mr. Seaton could not move till they did.

There was no concealment from his wife now: with his aching head leaning on his hand, underneath the lights, he told her all.

"Robert," she said, catching up her breath, "can *nothing* be done to avert it?"

He shook his head. "The house is already closed."

"What will be the ending?"

In his heart's bitterness Robert Seaton could have laughed ironically at the question. The ending? Neither he nor any other man could foresee that.

"Miss Barle was hoping that perhaps you had been able to take care of her, Robert."

"Ay, I daresay. Others will be thinking the same: my father amidst them. His case—for me—will be the worst of all."

"It will be utter ruin, Elizabeth Barle says. It will mean going out of house, and home, and every thing. Every shilling she had, you know, was put into the Great Loan and Discount Company."

"Every shilling that I have is in it too."

Mrs. Seaton knew it well.

"It is an awful time," he resumed; "a nearly universal wreck. Associations, supposed to be stable, banks, private firms—all are falling together. The panic in the city to-day has been something fearful."

"But, Robert, what has led to it?"

What had led to it? Robert Seaton was not prepared to answer the question. As yet he scarcely understood himself. It had been a go-ahead age for some years past. The world, throwing off its old jog-trot pace, had been rushing along on wheels. People had not been content to plod on slowly and perseveringly to riches, as the old custom was, but had leaped into them with a spring. Gigantic companies had been organized, banks had been started, mysterious offices had sprung up: the public flourished. The safe old four or five per cent. interest had been despised; cast to the winds: capitalists, whether small or large; retired officers; old ladies and young, possessing a few thousands, must get their six, seven, eight—goodness knows how much more per cent. for their money. Young men beginning life, had set up their households on a grand scale, and driven to town in their broughams: their fathers, ten times more really wealthy than they were, taking the omnibus still. With so much money coming in universally for a short while, it could not be but that foundations should totter. And a general collapse had supervened.

These truths suggested themselves dimly to Robert Seaton. A sage gentleman had propounded them in his hearing that day, at the board-table of the Great Loan and Discount Company. Robert Seaton supposed it might have been so: he had not quite formed his opinion. He had been one of the many to reap large benefits and go ahead: and he could not make more or less of it than that if he tried for ever.

They sat up talking the best part of the night, he and his wife. Perhaps there were many more households in London that miserable night, ruined as they were, who did the same.

The days went on; the unhappy days. Intense gloom, like a pall, hung over the financial world of the metropolis. Things got worse instead of better: what was dark at first, settled down into the blackest of irredeemable black.

But we have only to do with the Great Loan and Discount Company. Its collapse was utter. Hard things were said of it. If its sufferers did not call it a swindle, they went very near it. Robert Seaton, as acting manager, came in for the brunt of the blame. The clerks could take themselves off; the directors sheltered themselves at home under the plea of sore throats and headaches; but Mr. Seaton must be at his post, pending the winding-up.

There was nothing to wind-up. Save debts. Debts and enormous liabilities to creditors. The Great Loan and Discount had a great deal of money owing to it, for which they held paper; promissory notes, discounted bills, and so on: but as the parties, liable for all these, were involved in the general public ruin, Mr. Seaton might as well have pitched the documents into the fire, for all the good they were. Abuse fell upon his head thick and three-fold. It was certain that he—he

himself—had induced several friends to put their spare money into the concern : in some cases their *all*. Miss Barle was one. It was of no use for Robert Seaton to reiterate to these people that he had acted alone from a wish to serve them—that he had implicitly believed the Great Loan and Discount Company had stood on sound and firm legs—and that it was the breaking-up of other and larger concerns that had involved it in sudden and unforeseen ruin. The most civil retort made to him was—that he ought to have foreseen it.

How Robert Seaton bore through the weeks that ensued, he scarcely knew : the time would lie on his mind for years as something to be shuddered at. For he was a sensitive-natured man, of high principles, and would not willingly have wronged or misled his neighbour. But he got the credit of having done it. Ruined men ; ay, and women too ; told him to his face that he was dishonourable, dishonest, next door to a thief. They overlooked the fact that he was more completely ruined than they were. It was very hard to bear.

He had to go out of his home a penniless man, with the stigma of insolvency attaching to him. He was personally liable for certain claims connected with the once flourishing company, and his furniture and effects were ruthlessly seized to satisfy, so far as they would, the demands. Poor man ! Poor wife ! Poor little children !

Some lines of retrospect are necessary. Seaton Farm, in the county of Kent, was not a farm in the usual acceptance of the word, but a gentleman's estate. Notwithstanding, its land was tolerably extensive, and required active supervision. The house was a moderate-sized residence, the homestead of the Seaton family. Paul Seaton (the father of Robert) lived there. He had about fifteen hundred a year, all told. His eldest son, Charles, was in the army ; his four daughters lived at home with him ; Robert was younger. Economical, highly respectable people, these Seatons, and quiet : fast people called them slow. Mr. Seaton was an exact and rather hard man. His land was managed by one James Rouse, who was called the steward, and lived in a pretty dwelling. The estate, not entailed, was intended for Charles ; Robert, who would have to get his living in right earnest, hesitated between farming—which he understood—and the Bar ; but eventually chose the latter. Before the choice was decided, he would sometimes ask his father in a half-joking, half-serious manner, to promise to put him into the steward's place and house whenever old Rouse should drop off. Of course Mr. Seaton turned a deaf ear.

Once in two or three years, or so, Mr. Seaton would treat his daughters to a short season in London. It was while Robert was "eating his dinners," thereby qualifying himself to wear a wig and gown, that they came up on one of these visits. The sisters made him quit his lodgings and take up his abode with them for the time being : he had been loved

and indulged by them always. During this sojourn—they had a furnished house near Eaton Square—Robert fell into trouble. That is, into love: which in his case came to the same thing. The young lady, Anne Elliot, was a governess in a neighbouring household: and she had nothing whatever to recommend her save her good face, and her good principles. A most desirable girl *with* money; old Mr. Seaton might have acknowledged that: without it, one not to be noticed or looked at.

There ensued some tribulation. When it came out that Robert Seaton had made the acquaintance of this neighbouring girl, and asked her to marry him, Mr. Seaton and his daughters were dumb with horror. A governess!—for Robert Seaton! And one without a penny-piece!

It ended in an estrangement. A parting. And Mr. Seaton assured his son that it would be for life. Robert would not give up Anne Elliot. The family in which she taught, by way of showing *their* opinion of the fitness of things, turned the young lady away. Robert civilly demanded his portion from his father—three thousand pounds—and married her. The money was Robert's own. Mr. Seaton did not attempt to keep it from him: he shook his hands of Robert and the money together, and took unto himself merit for so doing.

"I do not wish you to come altogether to the dogs, Robert Seaton," he said, his cold eyes averted, his cold voice wearing its hardest tone, "therefore I hand you over your fortune. Put out to proper interest, it will bring you in one hundred and fifty pounds per annum. You can contrive to live upon that, if you choose, while you make way in your profession." "Only—do not attempt to keep up any intercourse with me or my family; and remember that you will never have any assistance from me or mine. Henceforth we are strangers."

Anne Elliot—Anne Seaton then—thought the hundred-and-fifty would be ample for them, if they were economical—and she would take care of that. But Robert Seaton made a different use of the money. The Great Loan and Discount Company, then being set up, came in his way. He was told it would be a grand thing; he thought it would be, and he threw his services and his three thousand pounds into it. So he abandoned his study for the Bar, and never was called.

So wonderful a success did the Great Loan and Discount turn out, the returns for embarked money were so enormous, that Robert Seaton broke through the interdict of holding no communication with his father and wrote to him. In his good-feeling, for he was ever kind-hearted, he thought he saw a way of atoning for the heartburning he had caused. "Dear father," he said, "the object of my writing to you must plead my excuse." Placing before his father a simple statement of facts, of what the company was really doing, he suggested that he should place a few thousand pounds in it. Mr. Seaton—never a man more alive to his

pecuniary interests than he—condescended to reply, demanding further details. Finally he came to London, and had an interview with Robert at the office; and the result was that he embarked in it all the money he could scrape together—somewhere about eight thousand pounds. But he took care to let Robert know that his offence was not in the least condoned—that they were strangers as heretofore.

For two or three short years, Mr. Seaton received the benefit of his investment in the shape of a very large interest. And now the crash came; and his money was gone. It will readily be understood how intensely Robert Seaton felt this; his own ruin seemed to him as nothing, compared with the loss he had brought upon his father.

As to Mr. Seaton, words would not be able to describe his consternation and wrath. The letter of reproach that Robert received from him, he will never forget while life shall last. Mr. Seaton accused him, as others had done, of having deluded him from interested motives: of having only got the money from him to serve himself. That, to Robert, was more bitter than all.

But it was in truth a serious affair for Mr. Seaton. Gaining more, he had been spending more: and had allowed his eldest son, who was in India, to draw upon him rather largely. He quitted Seaton Farm, letting the house, but not the land: that remained under the charge of Rouse, the faithful steward. The family retired to the Continent; where they might live at as small a cost as they pleased, and indulge their bitter animosity against the scapegrace, Robert. Thus from two to three years went on.

II.

THE fire was getting low in the shabby little sitting-room. A lady, her gown faded and worn, sat sewing fast by the light of a solitary candle, a weary look on her attenuated face. The house was on the outskirts of London, towards the south; its neighbourhood, bearing the reputation of being "genteel," as well as cheap.

The clock in the passage below—for this room was on the first floor—struck the hour. Nine. At the same moment, the front door opened and footsteps entered the passage. She glanced up to listen, an expectant look on her pale face. But no: the steps did not ascend.

"It is not Robert," she murmured; and caught up her needle again. "What can make him so late?"

You would never have taken her for that bright woman whom you once saw seated at her breakfast-table in the blue muslin dress—Mrs. Seaton—so worn and subdued was she now. But long-continued adversity changes most people.

A quarter of an hour's hard sewing—at least as hard as her feeble fingers could accomplish, for she had latterly been very ill—and the work was finished. It was a little warm pelisse or coat, made out of the best parts of a gown that had done its full duty for herself.

She held it up to the light to take a general view; and was satisfied.

"It will do nicely for him, poor little fellow."

Putting some coal on the fire—but not much; for coal was no more plentiful with them than were other luxuries—she moved quietly about, setting things straight, when a baby's cry was heard from the next room. She strove to hush the child to sleep again by gently rocking his cradle. But, baby like, he would not be hushed; and Mrs. Seaton had to take him up and quiet him in another way. After laying him down again, she passed into a small apartment, no larger than a closet, on the same landing, and looked at the two children sleeping there: a little girl between six and seven, a boy younger. Scarcely was she back again by the fire when Robert Seaton came in.

Ah, how he had altered! *She* was changed; but not as he was. The step was listless, the face haggard. The once bright hair had thinned at the temples.

"Robert, I thought you must have been lost," she exclaimed, as he flung himself into a chair.

"I have been to Holloway," he answered. "There was an advertisement in the paper this morning for some one to assist a tradesman there for a few weeks to send out Christmas accounts and post his books: application to be made after six o'clock in the evening."

"Did you get it?" she inquired, her tone unconsciously taking a sound of hope.

"No. Some one had been there before me. I am dead tired, Anne."

"But—you did not walk all the way back?"

"Every step of it. And there also."

She laid a tray-cloth across half the table, put two cups upon it, the loaf, and some butter. Pray don't think they were fashionable people, going to tea at this fashionable hour. It was tea and supper in one: ay, and sometimes for Robert Seaton, dinner too, this meal.

"I am very sorry, Robert," she sighed, "I could not get any meat to-day. The butcher would not trust me."

"What did you have for dinner?" he gently asked.

"Oh, we managed," was the rather evasive reply. "The children had some nice boiled rice and treacle. See, Robert: I have finished Paul's pelisse. Won't it be warm for him?"

Robert Seaton nodded as she held it out, but answer made he none. He was nearly broken in spirit and in heart, this man. Perhaps he could not bear misfortune bravely. Some can; and never show it.

"I think I am almost too tired to eat, Anne."

"Robert, you must. You must eat. Why, you would break down utterly if you did not."

She poured out the tea. He cut some bread-and-butter for her, and

a thick crust for himself. They began talking of the badness of times. So very many men of the better classes were out of employment, engineers especially. It had been the case ever since that deplorable panic, two years and a half ago.

"As I came through the shop at Holloway to-night, after speaking to the proprietor in his box of a counting-house, there were ten or a dozen men waiting in it, on the same errand that I had gone," he observed, as he slowly spread a modicum of butter on his crust. "Some of them, I am sure, were gentlemen. If a post of any kind offers, fifty are ready to snap it up, no matter how inferior it may be. We are too thick on the ground, that's the fact."

Their present position seemed very hopeless. Mrs. Seaton turned her face to front the fire. Her eyes had filled with tears, and she would have hidden them from him. He saw, for all that.

"Don't Anne. Crying will not mend it."

"If I could see an ending to it," she answered, letting the tears trickle down. "If I could only see what the end will be, and when it will come. We *cannot* go on like this for ever. And I—I am not able to help. My strength seems as if it would not return to me."

He knew why; knew it all too well: that the nourishment she took was not of the right kind, or sufficient for her. And there was that great healthy, hungry baby! Robert Seaton ventured on an unusual word of cheering.

"Something will turn-up, Anne. Don't you despair."

"No. I shall not do that until I lose my faith in God."

She put away the traces of the supper, her husband leaning forward gloomily over the scrap of fire, noticing nothing. When he looked round, she was sitting quietly, mending the children's socks.

"Would you please snuff the candle, Robert?"

It was one of the old-fashioned moulds, cheaper than the newer composites; and, as Mrs. Seaton thought, giving a better light. As he obeyed, he asked her whether she need work again to-night: she seemed to be always at work.

Yes, always. Where the wardrobe of children cannot be suitably replenished, only those who have experienced it can know what time and labour it costs to keep the old things in barely decent order. With a faint laugh, Mrs. Seaton held to his view the sock on her fingers: a heap of darns, a heap of holes.

"There is so much to do for them, Robert. I have to make use of every spare moment."

He turned his face to the fire again. Heaven knew how bitterly all this told on Robert Seaton. And he was powerless to alter it. To himself he would often present the image of a man with, metaphorically speaking, his wings clipped.

"In three days it will be Christmas Day, Robert," she said in a half-

timid tone, breaking the silence. She did not like to add "and what shall we do?"—she did not say "Is there any chance of Christmas cheer for us?" But he understood her.

"You will have some money to-morrow evening, Anne. I happened to meet John Hadcock to-day in the Strand; and he promised to lend me a sovereign or two if I'd call in at his office to-morrow. It will tide us over Christmas."

"Oh how glad I am!" she said brightly.

Once more the baby awoke and cried. Mrs. Seaton put up her work for the night and went to bed to hush it. Her husband sat on still, though the fire was out.

He was doing what he was too much given to do—recalling the miserable road of his downfall; the panorama of ill-luck, scene by scene, since his trouble set-in. How they had contrived to go on during these two years and a half, he could hardly tell. Many a one, looking back on the same similar ill-fate, can no more tell than Robert Seaton could. God must have kept them; must have provided food and necessities day by day—that is the best they can say. And well for all if they say it from the heart.

After they had been driven from their happy home—penniless, save for a few personal trifles, that were afterwards turned into small sums of money at need—Robert Seaton was seized with a very serious illness. It left him too shattered for a long while to do anything. A case like this brings out the wife's energies—if she possesses any. Mrs. Seaton got together a few pupils and taught them music; and so earned a little money. She ventured to write to Mr. Seaton, (enclosing the letter to his London bankers, for she did not know his address) telling him of the sick state of his son. After some time the letter was returned to her by Mr. Seaton—they knew his hand-writing on the envelope, which bore a foreign post-mark—returned without a word.

They had existed in some way; contriving to keep up an appearance of respectability. Robert Seaton had been unable to get into anything, good or bad, high or low, though he sought to do it with all his best energies. Too many, like himself, were out of employment; men were jostling each other. It is true; as the world knows. Now and again, some friend, who had known him in better days, would assist him with a little money—a loan, to be paid back if good times ever came again. But this assistance was but rare: Robert Seaton was one of those sensitive men who cannot ask without feeling the deepest pain and humiliation. A repulse to him seemed worse than death: and he had to experience it again and again. Few are willing to lend, especially to one who is fallen. And so the time had gone on somehow: he getting a little, Mrs. Seaton a little by her music pupils. They had had to change their home every few months, each time falling lower

in the social ladder. In the present house they had this small first floor and the use of the back kitchen.

It had been soon after they entered on it, that an additional misfortune fell upon them—the birth of the baby. It stopped Mrs. Seaton's teaching—for she was very ill, and continued so. She could not get out to her pupils (poor pupils at the best, and scantily paid for); they did not come to her, for she had no piano. The very fact of their being in so prospectless a condition made her fret; and that was not the best way to gain strength. The child was two months old now, and she only seemed to get weaker.

"It has come to that pass that I don't mind what I do," muttered Robert Seaton, reviewing all these miseries over his fireless grate. "I'd break stones in the road if I could only get a living at it." Others have said it before him.

John Hadcock's promised help of a sovereign or two did not come. When Robert Seaton called, as by appointment, he was told that Mr. Hadcock had left town for a few days. Was it true?—or only an excuse? He had got to doubt these answers. On Christmas Eve he mustered up his courage to apply to some one else—who had assisted him before and never turned a deaf ear. But this gentleman really was out of town: had gone, his clerk said, until the following Tuesday. And so that application was also fruitless.

Sick at heart, fainting in spirit, weary of foot, Robert Seaton set out to retrace his steps homewards. What was he to do?—he might not steal: he did not like to beg; it appeared that he could not borrow. The busy streets were full that afternoon: eager crowds jostled him. Gay shops displayed their tempting Christmas wares; men and women pressed round the windows to gaze, and flocked in and out with their purchases. All seemed to have plenty of money; all, save he. He had about two shillings in his pocket, counting up halfpence and farthings: and he knew not whence in the wide world to get the wherewithal to buy a bit of dinner for them on the morrow, with the other necessities to tide over Christmas Day and Sunday. He began ransacking his brains, as to whether there was *anything* left to them worth pledging—that he might provide it in that way. And he believed there was not. A ragged man and child were singing in the road: even they seemed to have money given them. He saw a sixpence tossed—the donor was a fat woman in a red shawl, with a basket on her arm—he saw pence: people open their hearts to the poor at Christmas. Only he seemed destitute—he, the apparent gentleman, walking along at his ease.

"Oh papa, papa! Mamma's ill. She's lying on the bed with her eyes shut."

The words greeted him as he entered the house. His pretty little girl, her fair hair flying behind her, came sobbing down the stairs to speak them. Paul stood on the top with a stolid face: the boy hardly knew what was the meaning of the bustle; what not.

"What do you say is the matter with mamma, Annie?" he asked, hastening up.

"She fell down on the floor: she can't speak," answered the child. "Mr. Tarn is there."

Weakness, or some accession of illness had made Mrs. Seaton faint. The frightened children called up the people below; and they, finding she did not come to, ran for the doctor.

She began to revive as Robert entered. Mr. Tarn was the medical man who had been recently attending her—and he was not paid yet. Before quitting, when she had come round, and was sitting up, he spoke a few words aside in the husband's ear.

"Mr. Seaton, your wife *must* have better nourishment. Don't be angry if I speak of this—I have gleaned somewhat of the state of affairs from little Annie. Wine is absolutely essential for her, so is meat. Try and let her have them, there's a good fellow. Otherwise I will not be answerable for the result."

Let her have them! Why, he would have given them to her with his heart's best blood! But how? How procure them?

He bent his head in bitter perplexity, sitting forwards. The fire was blazing just then, and lighted up his worn, haggard, but still most refined face. The shades of evening had drawn on, and the room had no light save the fire. Annie sat on the carpet holding the baby across her lap; Paul played with a tailless horse out of Noah's ark. Mrs. Seaton was asleep on the bed in the other room, after taking a cordial procured for her.

"I am to have my new pelisse on to-morrow if papa takes me for a walk," spoke Paul suddenly. "Mamma said so."

Could Paul have discerned the frightful idea that the word suggested to his father, he might have been struck into his shoes with indignation. *That newly-made pelisse: would it not pledge for a shilling or two?*

"I want my tea," said Paul again.

"When mamma gets up," reproved wise little Annie. "Don't be impatient, sir."

"Hush, children!" exclaimed Robert Seaton in a whisper. "You will wake mamma. We must be quiet and let her sleep, you know, that she may get well."

And they sat on again. The blaze went down; the room darkened. Pondering upon this and that, a thought dawned upon Robert Seaton's mind, and did not go away again. At first he mentally derided it for its utter absurdity; its wild impracticability. But, as we all know, dwelling on a thing softens its asperities down; and Robert Seaton ended by asking himself—Should he do this?

Should he go into the streets that Christmas Eve night and sing for money?—as he had seen the ragged man do in the afternoon. It might

return a better harvest than Paul's pelisse : if he could only bring his pride to it.

The inner door was gently pushed open, and Mrs. Seaton entered, her face pale, her steps tottering. Robert hastened to her.

"My dear, you should not have got off the bed."

"I am well now," she said, with a smile. "How quiet you have all been."

He placed her in a chair. The children kissed her. Baby woke up then—as a matter of course—and had to be taken by its mamma. After tea the children went to bed ; the baby was laid in his crib. By that time, busy with one thing and another, Robert Seaton had arrived at the conclusion that his notion was only fit for a man insane.

Stumping up the stairs came the greengrocer. He wanted the money owing for the coals sent in that morning. Robert could only give promises ; and the man said an uncivil word or two—about gentlefolks living at ease on honest folks' work. The matter upset him. When the man had gone he leaned his elbow on the mantel-piece, dreadfully depressed. All the worst of his position, and in an exaggerated form, stared him full in the face : he felt as if he must give up to desperation. What Mrs. Seaton saw in his countenance struck a nameless terror to her.

"Robert," she softly said, with a catching-up of the breath, "don't, don't despair. God will surely remember us if we only bear up and trust in Him."

"I don't think He seems to do much for us," was the callous answer—but in truth he was nearly beside himself, and all heart and spirit had gone out of him. "We have been waiting for help of some kind or other rather long."

"Robert ! Robert ! Oh, don't—don't lose your best faith !" was her imploring cry. "It would kill me. As long as you bear up, I can."

He caught her hand in his, and stood with his arm round her. Stood for some minutes, saying nothing ; only looking into the fire, and thinking. "May God give me strength to do this thing !" was his mental conclusion.

"But where are you going, Robert?"—for he was moving to the door.

"Only on an errand, my dear. I'll not be longer than I can help."

"But where—where?" she cried, stepping up to him—and he detected a strange anxiety in her eyes and tone.

"To see about some dinner for to-morrow. Indeed, I'll be back as soon as I can."

Kissing her as fondly as ever he had done in their happier days, he passed down the stairs, flinging over his shoulders a dark cloth cape of his. It looked better than it was, for the moths had filled it with small holes—as might be seen when held up to the light. He had tried to pledge it once and the pawnbroker would not take it in. With this cape

drawn well up, and his broad-brimmed hat drawn well down, he was not readily recognisable.

Robert Seaton was going out in the streets to sing. He had brought his courage to the point. Under the shades of night, and wrapped up from observation, he felt that he would do it. It might bring him in a little harvest of silver. Whatever else he had lost, he had not lost his sweet voice for singing.

Onwards he pressed. Up one street, down another; nearer and nearer to the great town. Turning into a quiet road, where a row of handsome houses faced some trees on the opposite side, he thought here might be a good place to begin. The houses were most of them ablaze with light: happy families within had assembled to usher-in Christmas. In the drawing-room of the first, the blinds were up, and he could see a couch placed close to the window, and a gentleman lying on it. Yes, this was undoubtedly as favourable a spot as any.

Robert Seaton's heart was beating and thumping as though he were about to commit a crime. He *could* not raise his voice to begin. It is a fact. For full ten minutes he hovered about there in hesitating timidity. And then he mentally called himself hard names, and strove to imagine himself a real street-singer, and to take comfort in the thought that those who heard would never dream of his being anything else.

All the way, coming along, he had been deliberating what he should commence with. Not with one of the frivolous modern songs—as too many of them are: he could not have brought his aching heart to it. So he broke forth into one of the old melodies that must always be welcome.

It was a double-room, this lighted drawing-room where the blinds were up. Beyond the folding-doors, standing only half open, four people sat at whist: an elderly gentleman and his three daughters. Another daughter stood by the fire talking with a very young man, an ensign in the army. The gentleman on the sofa in the front room was ill, and liked to lie in as much quiet as might be. He had come home from India invalided; and his father and sisters hastened from the Continent to receive and nurse him. That was a month or two ago. A tall, fine man he looked, lying there; but the limbs were wasted, the face was sharp with suffering. The young lady not playing cards came in quietly and approached him. She was motherly-looking; five-and-thirty years of age at least.

"Charles, dear, are you sure you will not take anything? Some wine-and-water?—or an egg beaten up?—or——"

"Nothing, Letty," he interrupted, opening his eyes. "Let me be: that's all. I am quite comfortable."

"I hope—I hope you were not asleep! Did I waken you?"

"I was not asleep. Is George Callaway gone?"

"Oh, no. He means to stay and watch-in Christmas Day."

The invalid closed his eyes, and she went back to the other room. He had been buried in thoughts of India. But for this sickness which had overtaken him, he should have been now a married man, for he had engaged himself to a young lady out there. He knew now; he had known it for some two or three weeks past; that there could be neither recovery nor marriage for him. The sickness, in spite of all the skill of the doctors, would be a "sickness unto death:" and he was doing his best to reconcile himself to his fate, and to make his peace with God.

But there were bitter regrets in his heart yet: and he liked to lie at this, the still evening hour, and live in memories of the past: though it brought to his spirit a tender aching. How *poor* earthly interests were growing to appear beside those greater interests that he must soon inevitably enter on! The fret and tear of worldly ambition was over. It had been but folly at the wisest: as he saw and felt now.

His thoughts roamed away to his early life. His mother—he could remember still how passionately she had loved him—had died of the very complaint that had now developed itself in him: ay, and at about the same age too. Save for that one loss—it had occurred when he was old enough to grieve for it—his lot had been a sunny one. Heir to a sufficiently fair estate; handsome, well-bred; allowed to follow his inclination in wishing to enter the army; rather indulged as a boy; made much of by his proud sisters—yes, it had all been bright. But he was looking back now at the sombre aspects of the past, rather than the bright ones. The friends he had lost, who had gone before him into the land where there shall be no parting, kept coming into his mind one after another. His mother the first. She—

" Oft in the stilly night, ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond memory brings the light of other days around me.
The smiles, the tears of boyhood's years; the words of love then spoken;
The eyes that shone, now dimmed and gone, the cheerful hearts now broken."

A man's voice had broken into song right under the window: it was like a burst of melody. Captain Seaton (you have scarcely failed to recognize the family) raised himself on his elbow, his breath held, his lips parted. Not a word, not a tone lost he.

It was not so much that the song had sprung up in strange assimilation with his thoughts; it was not that the voice had in it a low, sad, sweet thrill of music: but it was also that the song and the singer brought back to Captain Seaton those by-gone days with startling vividness. This song had been a favourite one at home: Robert used to sing it. Why! Robert had sung it, amidst others, the very night before he, Charles Seaton, departed for India. But for its utter improbability he could have fancied it was his brother singing it now, the tones and manner were so like what Robert's used to be—poor Robert, who had since gone to the dogs. Neither before nor after had he heard

anybody sing it as Robert sang it: until now. Hush! the second verse was beginning.

"When I remember all, the friends so linked together,
I've seen around me fall, like leaves in wintry weather;
I feel like one who treads alone some banquet-hall deserted,
Whose lights are fled, whose glory's dead, and all but he departed.
Thus in the stilly night ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Sad memory brings the light of other days around me."

The melody died away into a pause of stillness. George Callaway, a boy of nineteen, had come to the window to look and listen.

"A nice voice that; sings like a gentleman, not like a street-singer," remarked the young ensign. "Some poor fellow hard up, perhaps."

"Ay," said Captain Seaton, keeping one hand over his eyes, "Take him this, George."

The ensign went down with the shilling, and dropped it into the singer's hand—a man in a cape and slouched hat.

"Thank you," was the answer. And the accent was quite a refined one.

"Your voice is that of a gentleman," said the boy impulsively. "It's not like a street-singer's."

"Distress makes me do it," returned Robert Seaton, quite as impulsively and more incautiously than the other. "Thank you, again."

Ensign Callaway closed the door behind him, and went upstairs. The singer moved off a few steps to the next house, and began another song: "O Bay of Dublin."

But the incident had brought his brother Robert all too forcibly to the mind of Captain Seaton. Never a supposition, however, crossed him that it was really Robert: men rarely see a romance when it lies before their faces ready to be picked up. All the sad and tender memories connected with his boyhood's home were dancing through the mind of Captain Seaton. Images passed swiftly one into the other. The time that had been; the present days that were now flying, oh very swiftly; the future that he would so soon have entered on to spend in eternity. Never had he felt so sad: never had he realised the truth of the awful responsibility that lay upon him—that must lie upon all who are dying. He *thought* more, in that one hour, than he had during his whole previous life or through his illness: at least, more to the purpose. The sweet voice of the singer had echoed in his ear, fainter and fainter, until it died away in the distance: it remained to haunt his memory. He had been content to accept the report furnished him, that Robert had misbehaved himself and was gone to the dogs: but he asked himself now whether some other duty might not lie upon him. Certainly it was an hour fraught with the most earnest reflection to Captain Seaton.

A movement at his elbow caused him to look up suddenly. His father had approached. The girls and the ensign (they had known him

when he was in long clothes) had gone to the dining-room below to feast upon toast and mulled wine. To Mr. Seaton's surprise he saw the eyes, looking up so wistfully, were swimming in tears.

"Why, Charles! What's amiss?"

"I—I have been thinking a good deal, sir. Of old times."

"Will you come downstairs? We are going to drink-in Christmas—for good luck."

Charles Seaton shook his head. He knew he should not live to see another: he would not "drink-in" this. Mr. Seaton, divining somewhat of the refusal, stayed where he was.

"We used always to drink it in at Seaton Farm, Charles. You remember that?"

"Over well, father. It has been present with me to-night amidst other remembrances. You, and the girls, and I, and Robert—little Bobby, that we all so loved."

Mr. Seaton growled at the name.

"Where is he, sir?"

"Where is he! Do you suppose I know—or care? When a son turns out as he did, he is not worth looking after."

"What he did—sir, I cannot help thinking it—might have been done in the best of good faith," said Captain Seaton.

"Was his obstinate marriage an act of good faith—the marrying of a girl beneath him? Did the giving up of his profession show good faith? He came to me with a demand—like the Prodigal Son in Scripture—'Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me;' and I gave to him, and cast him off. Was the deluding me—since—into risking and losing my thousands—the money that I had been saving up for his sisters' fortunes—done in good faith? Don't talk nonsense, Charles," concluded the angry gentleman.

"But I want to talk to you, sir."

"Not about *him*."

"The Prodigal Son, when he came home to his father repentant, was welcomed with tears and kisses; with music, and dancing, and rejoicing; they put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet—for he had been lost, and was found. Oh, sir! those parables were spoken that we might learn a lesson from them. I want you to let me find Robert."

"What on earth has put you on to this?" cried Mr. Seaton.

"An hour or two ago, a man was singing in the street underneath; one of Robert's songs, 'Oft in the stilly night.' But for the absurdity of any such supposition, I could have thought it Robert himself, it was so like his voice. It has set me thinking, father;—it seems almost as though it had been a message of reminder sent to me by God. I must see Robert before I die."

Mr. Seaton's comment on this was something between a growl and a groan.

"Father, don't refuse me. You must let him come to see me if he can be found. I am not asking you now to be reconciled to him : that may take place later—as I have no doubt it will. I must see Robert : I could not, else, die in peace. Why—only think, father—I could not hope to go into Heaven unreconciled to my brother."

"I did not know *you* had been at war with him," snapped Mr. Seaton.

"But I have tacitly taken up cause against him as though I were, and have not attempted to seek him out."

"He was a wilful,—pig-headed——"

The bells of the church hard by clashed out with their joyous chimes, drowning the hard words.

"Peace on earth and good will to men !" murmured Charles Seaton as they listened. "Dear father, I know you will never deny me. Next Christmas Eve, when those bells ring out, I shall not be here."

"I'm sure *I* don't know where he has got to, or what's become of him," said Mr. Seaton in resentment, when the bells were silent and their echo had died away.

"I shall have gone on before," resumed Charles, as if continuing what he had last said. "Father, you may be glad of Robert then."

Mr. Seaton growled outright at this ; nearly screamed. *He* be glad of Robert ! The world would be more likely to take fire than *that* come to pass.

"I say I don't know how to find him, or where to look for him. Such a scamp as that, Charles ! He may have gone off to Botany Bay."

"We can advertise," said Captain Seaton. "Thank God," was his fervent thought. "It will all come right."

Robert Seaton went home with seven shillings and nine-pence half-penny. His singing had been appreciated—and, as was above remarked, hearts open at Christmas time. That is, he carried in one shilling in cash, and goods that represented the rest.

But with the next week began again the carking care. On the Wednesday, when his head and heart were alike aching, some one showed him an advertisement in the *Times* newspaper.

"Robert Seaton. Captain Charles Seaton, home from India and very ill, wishes to find his brother Robert, whose present address he does not know. Lose no time."

Robert lost no time. The true address had been appended, and he hastened to it.

Why ! it was the very house before which he had sung : whence they had sent him out a shilling. And—on that sofa—good heavens ! it must have been his brother who had lain there. He was lying there now—but oh ! with what a changed face, so wan and wasted. His own was wasted. They hardly knew each other.

"Charles!"

"Robert!"

With a great cry they were in each other's arms. Old Mr. Seaton (looking on through the not quite closed inner door) protested, in a mutter, that Charles was a fool; and then wondered what was the matter with his own eyes that he had to wipe them.

Need any more be said? A reconciliation took place, and Robert Seaton's troubles were over. With great difficulty—assumed, at any rate—Mr. Seaton was got to believe that Robert had meant good instead of harm in regard to that miserable money, and to condone the past.

"Now I am not going to keep you in idleness, Robert," he said, "but I'll give you an opportunity of earning a living. Poor old Rouse is dead: I've had the news this morning; and if you like to take his place and live in his dwelling-house, why you can. It'll be large enough for you and your family."

Robert Seaton's heart rose up with a sob of gratitude. After all his troubles and privations, the prospect seemed nothing less than Paradise.

"It will all come right in time, Robert," whispered his brother, pressing his hand. "I can see it. You will be the heir when I am gone. My father could not let any but a Seaton succeed to Seaton Farm."

Charles Seaton wanted to see Anne. Robert brought her with the two elder children, Paul in his new coat. Mr. Seaton was civil, and condescended to shake hands; and the Miss Seaton's kissed their brother's wife.

"Are you my grandpapa?" questioned young Mr. Paul sturdily.

"I believe I am," said the old gentleman.

"This is my new pelisse. Mamma made it. We've got a baby at home. His name's Bob."

"Oh indeed. What's your name?"

"Paul. The same as grandp—the same as yours."

What with one thing and another, chiefly perhaps on account of the name, Mr. Seaton took a fancy to young Master Paul—and invited him to come again.

"I'd not say, Robert, but perhaps you and yours may all spend next Christmas Day with me in the old homestead," cried the old gentleman, opening his heart a little. "We are going down to live there again. It's not a promise, mind. I shall see how you behave. Charles, you'd like it. But I forgot," he added, his tone changing, his words suddenly cut short in their midst. "Charles—I fear—you may not then be with us."

"No, father, not then. I shall be in a brighter and better homestead than even Seaton Farm."

DRIFTING.

ECHOES of cathedral music
 Heard—it may be—long ago,
 Linger with us unforgotten,
 Haunt us still, and live and grow ;
 They are drifting, softly drifting
 Through 'the wild unrest of life,
 Golden organ-notes, uplifting
 Weary souls above the strife.

Though the clamour of the city
 Round our outer being rolls,
 Still those sacred notes are filling
 All the chambers of our souls ;
 As if touched by hands immortal,
 Stray chords, tremulous with love,
 Drifted through some open portal
 Of the wondrous church above !

In the gray and silent morning,
 Ere the shadows are withdrawn,
 When the white mist hides the valley
 With a veil of airy lawn ;
 Then we listen,—hearing slowly
 Through the stillness deep and calm,
 Murmurs of that music holy,
 Like the cadence of a psalm.

When the summer sunset lingers
 Low adown the crimson west,
 And the weary hands are folded
 With the blessed sense of rest,
 Then we listen,—strengthened, soothèd
 By the magic of that strain,
 Till the furrowed brow is smoothèd,
 And the heart grows young again.

They are drifting, softly drifting
 Through the great world's daily strife,
 Golden organ-notes that tell us
 Of a new and better life :
 Low, clear music, sweetly blending
 With the spirit's voiceless cry ;
 Under-tones that have no ending,
 Echoes of eternity !

SARAH DOUDNEY.

